

Resting for a Living

November 29, 2015

Can any of you relate to the Tom Petty song the band just played? This song seems to be about a person who's running after an elusive dream. How many of you would say that describes your life at the present time? What dreams are you currently running after? Stop and think about it for a second. "What part of the American dream are you pursuing?"

Maybe for some, you've been running after that dream house and you're trying hard to get to a place where you can afford it. Maybe some of you are running after the dream of good health and you're working out and eating right to insure a long life. Maybe you're chasing the dream of the ideal career and you're going to college or attending night classes to obtain it. Maybe it's a

dream of independence and so you're trying hard to free yourself from others. Maybe some of you just dream of a happy marriage and happy, healthy children. Whatever your dreams may be, many of us are running hard and running fast to achieve them.

But sometimes, like the song said, our dreams are elusive. Sometimes they appear to be out of reach, don't they? Sometimes it seems that no matter how hard we try or how fast we run, our dreams are just outside our grasp. But that doesn't stop us. We just keep working harder and harder because we've been taught from childhood that if you work hard, eventually, hopefully, your dreams will come true.

Even though the bible clearly teaches the value of hard work, there's a subtle danger that can creep into our lives where work is concerned if we

aren't careful. The danger can be summed up in a little phrase my old boss at Hallmark used to quote to me quite often.

IF IT'S GOING TO BE, IT'S UP TO ME.

How many of you have heard that phrase before? It sounds pretty good on the surface. It sounds a lot like the song we just heard: "run hard after your dreams." If you want something bad enough, then just make it happen.

But there's a problem with my boss's little proverb. The problem is that it's a lie. Here's the truth:

IT'S NOT ALL UP TO ME.

It never was, and it never will be. The problem with this philosophy is that it assumes we can accomplish most anything in life by simply

exerting enough willpower or human effort. This philosophy is often referred to, by scholars, as “secular humanism”.

Secular humanism is the belief that mankind is capable of moral and self-fulfillment without the need for God.

This is exactly the kind of thinking that permeates the world we live in. Moses warned against this kind of “humanistic” philosophy in the OT book of Deuteronomy. When he spoke to the second generation of the children of Israel as they prepared to enter into the Promised Land he said,

"In the wilderness He(God) fed you manna which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do good for you in the end. "Otherwise, you may say in your heart, 'My power and the

strength of my hand made me this wealth.'

"But you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day. Deuteronomy 8:16-18

Just like the children of Israel, we need to be reminded that it's God, and not us, who makes things happen. We may think we are the ones who are doing it. We may think it's our power, or our brains, or our strength that has gotten us where we are today, but we need to think again. That sort of thinking is secular humanism and it's not Christian. And we have fallen prey to this type of philosophy whenever we start believing, "If it's going to be, it's up to me." I myself have fallen into to this kind of stinkin' thinkin' in the past year.

As many of you know, one of the benefits of being a pastor at NHCC is that we get a sabbatical every six years or so. During my sabbatical this past summer, I had some time to rest, relax and reflect on my life as well as see two of my sons get married.

But something happened during the last week of my sabbatical that really grabbed my attention. I was staying overnight at a hotel in Topeka, KS and right at the end of my prayer time, just as I was getting frustrated that I hadn't received anything from God, I was suddenly overwhelmed by an inner prompting that was as clear as if God had spoken to me in person. Just so you know, it wasn't an audible voice or anything like that. Rather, God impressed upon my mind three little, but powerful words as I was just about to stop praying. Those three little words were simply:

“Rest, my son.”

To you, those words might not mean much, but for me, they were packed with significance. The reason these words meant so much to me was because I had begun to drift in my relationship with God. I had begun to believe and act as though “if it was going to be, it was up to me.” I had been living like a secular humanist in a Christian body. So when I heard those words, “Rest my son”, they convicted me to the core. I realized at that moment something had to change. Prior to my sabbatical, I had fallen into a bad habit of working hard for Jesus. While that sounds good on the surface, my work was filled with a lot of humanistic self-effort. But God wanted to change that. God was trying to tell me that I’d been working hard and running hard for Jesus, but not resting in him.

**God wanted me to stop WORKING FOR
JESUS and instead start RESTING IN JESUS.**

All this was huge for me that day in Topeka, KS and I've been internally processing it ever since.

I'm sure some of you may be thinking, "That's all well and good for you Ladell, but what does all of this have to do with me?" I think many of you are a lot like me. You are working hard, but you haven't yet learned what it means to rest. Maybe you, like me, haven't learned that God wants rest to permeate your entire life.

And that's why I want us to look at this topic today. Today I want to share with you some of the things I'm learning (through trial and error) about resting for a living. The rest I'm going to talk about comes from deep within and can sustain us no matter what situation we find ourselves in. And

just as God spoke to me about the need for spiritual rest in Topeka, I'm praying that he will do the same for you today. So let's begin our time with prayer.

A Warning about Rest

This idea of spiritual rest can be found throughout the bible, but today I want to focus on a particular passage in the book of Hebrews. In Hebrews 4, the writer explains what it means to rest in God. But instead of explaining what rest IS, he begins by showing us what spiritual rest is NOT. Read along with me.

Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also have had the good news proclaimed to us, just as they did; but the message they heard

was of no value to them, because they did not share the faith of those who obeyed.” Hebrews 4:1,2

As I said, the writer of Hebrews is introducing the topic of rest and he’s telling us that God has made a promise for us to experience rest. That’s the good news! But the bad news is that it’s possible for us to miss it...to fall short of it in our everyday lives. In this passage, he mentions a group of people who had the message of rest proclaimed to them, but they didn’t get it. They fell short of it. Who were these people and how did fall short? They were the Jewish people, the Israelites of the Old Testament and all you have to do is look back at their history to discover why they failed to experience the rest of God.

If you go to the book of Exodus, you can read about the story of how God used Moses to deliver

Israelites from 400 years of bondage and slavery in Egypt. As Moses led them out of Egypt, God went before them as they journeyed toward a new home he was preparing for them called Canaan or The Promised Land. As they traveled through the wilderness toward the Promised Land, the Israelites enjoyed the supernatural protection and guidance of God. They were guided by a moving cloud during the day, and by a pillar of fire at night. In addition, they also enjoyed a daily provision of food from God in the form of live quail and this flaky stuff called manna, which covered the ground every morning at each campsite.

Now you would think with all of this protection and provision from God, the Israelites would have been a sterling example of spiritual rest. But according to the verses we just read, they are a bad example...an example of a group of people

who never entered into God's rest. So the obvious question is this: if the Israelites were constantly protected and provided for by God, why didn't they experience God's rest? What was the problem?

To answer that question, we have to look closely at a particular episode during their journey through the wilderness at a time when Moses came down from Mount Sinai and delivered the written law to them. This law included the Ten Commandments. After Moses received the law from God and came down from the mountain, a curious thing happened after he read the law to the people of Israel. Listen to how they responded after hearing the codified law of God:

So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. All the people

answered together and said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do.” And Moses reported the words of the people to the LORD. Exodus 19:7,8 ESV

“All that the Lord has commanded we will do.”

What an interesting response. Now you may think there’s nothing wrong with what they said on the surface and I would agree. But when you look more closely at their journey, you find a curious pattern. Throughout their journey to the Promised Land, they failed time and time again to obey God. Every time God showed them grace, they just rebelled all the more. So when the time came for them to receive and respond to the written law of God, they arrogantly proclaimed that, “All the Lord has commanded we will do.”

They hadn’t obeyed God up to this point and they for sure weren’t going to obey in the future. Why?

Because they had become self-sufficient. They didn't need God. They were a rebellious and stiff-necked people. As a result, they were disciplined by God and every single adult that had come out of Egypt died in the wilderness over a span of 40 years and not one of them entered the Promised Land. They never experienced the rest of God because they preferred their own efforts and their own self sufficiency over dependence on God.

That's why the writer of the Hebrews tells us NOT to be like them. Listen to what he says:

Therefore since it still remains for some to enter that rest, and since those who formerly had the good news proclaimed to them did not go in because of their disobedience, God again set a certain day, calling it "Today." This he did when a long time later he spoke through David, as in the passage already quoted: "Today, if

you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”

Hebrews 4:6,7

“Don’t be like the Israelites. Don’t be hard hearted,” the writer says. “Today is the day to learn what it means to enter into God’s rest. Don’t stubbornly resist God. Be teachable”. That’s the warning we must heed today.

The Meaning of Rest

Now assuming that you all are like me and want to experience the promised rest of God and don’t want to become hard-hearted like the nation of Israel, the obvious question is: “What does it look like to rest in God?” In order to answer that question, let’s go back to Hebrews 4 and look at verse 10. It is here that we learn what rest really is and how to experience it. Read along with me.

... for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests

from their works, just as God did from his.

Hebrews 4:10 NIV

The mention of God resting in this verse is a direct reference back to the seventh day of creation. The writer is saying that just as God rested from his works, we are to rest from our works.

Unfortunately this verse is often misinterpreted. The emphasis in this passage is on resting from a certain TYPE or KIND of work, not from work itself. Yes, we all need to rest from physical work. But here the writer is commanding us to rest from a type of work he calls “OUR” work. The kind of work he’s referring to is kind that originates from an attitude independence and self-sufficiency. It’s the kind that flows from the “If it’s going to be, it’s up to me” philosophy. It’s the kind of work where the dependence is on us and

not God for wisdom, direction and power. What he's saying in vs. 10 is that

We must learn to rest from the WORKS OF OUR OWN SELF SUFFICIENCY.

You see, it's primarily OUR self-sufficiency that we are to rest from. We all have been brainwashed since birth with a false concept of the basis of human activity. We have been sold a satanic lie that we have in ourselves what it takes to be what we want to be, to achieve whatever we desire to be. We are sure we have what it takes, or, if we don't have it now, we know where we can find it. We can educate ourselves, we can acquire more information, we can develop new skills, and when we get this done we'll have what it takes to be what we want to be. That may be how the rest of the world operates, but not the way a Christian operates. The truth is just the opposite.

This divine principle of human activity is to rest from your OWN work and rely on GOD's work instead.

This is the essence of what the Apostle Paul says in the book of Galatians chapter 2. He says,

It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:20 ESV.

This was also the secret to the life of Jesus. He himself said,

"It is the Father who dwells in me who does the work," (John 14:10).

"The Son can do nothing by himself," (John 5:19).

The true secret of the Christian life is to cease

from dependence on one's own work and activity, and to rest in dependence upon the activity of Another, of Jesus who dwells within. This is the essence of spiritual rest. This is God's design for living today. It is not inactivity, but it is freedom from stress and anxiety. This is the principle upon which he expects everything to be done: our work, our schooling, our studies, our play, our responsibilities at the home, or wherever we are. All our activities are supposed to be lived out of reliance upon this new principle of human behavior. The principle of REST!

The “Labor” of Rest

Let's push pause for a second. So far, we've talked about a warning about rest: Don't be like the Israelites who, because of their own self sufficiency and rebellion, never experienced God's rest. Next, we discussed the meaning of

rest, that is, to cease from dependence on our own work and activity, and to rest in dependence upon the activity and work of Another, the Holy Spirit of Christ who dwells within us. Now let's take a few minutes to look at the practical application of this truth, in other words, let's look at the "how tos" of rest. But before we do, I want to show you something interesting in passage we've been studying.

In vs. 11, the writer of the Hebrews makes an interesting statement about how to apply this concept of rest. Listen carefully and notice the seemingly contradictory statement he makes about rest.

Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience. Hebrews 4:11

He said “make every effort to enter this rest.” That sounds kind of weird doesn’t it? Sounds contradictory to me. Sounds like he’s saying, “Work to rest.” Another bible translation says something similar: “Let us labor, therefore, to enter into that rest.” This command seems a little odd because he’s basically saying, “let us labor not to labor.”

What is he saying exactly? I think what he means is, “let us diligently apply this concept of rest to every area of our lives.” He’s telling us that rest doesn’t just happen. We have to be intentional about it. There is a part of rest that requires some activity on our part. We have “to do” something to insure we experience rest. So let’s take a few minutes and examine what it looks like to make every effort to enter God’s rest.

As I told you at the beginning of this message, my

journey along the road to spiritual rest has been one of trial and error. Definitely quite a few “trials” and a whole lot of “error”. I, like you, experience a lot of ups and downs whenever I try to “make every effort to enter God’s rest”.

So as I’ve been trying to apply this concept to my own life, I’ve noticed that it helps to look at rest from three different perspectives:

Resting in Jesus before ...

Resting in Jesus during ...

Resting in Jesus after ...

I put the words “in Jesus” in each phrase because the whole idea behind spiritual rest is to rest from our OWN works and relying on the work of ANOTHER, namely Jesus Christ. The “...” means that you fill in the blank.

Let’s begin with Resting in Jesus “before”...

This is probably the aspect of rest I struggle with the most because I tend to run ahead of God on so many things. “Resting in Jesus before...” means that we learn to wait on God to provide direction before we begin anything. We don’t start our activities before consulting with God. Jesus didn’t just make a plan, do a lot of stuff and then ask God to bless it. On the contrary, the bible says he did nothing of his own initiative. He rested and waited on God for direction. That’s why it says in Mark, “Very early in the morning, Jesus got up and went to a solitary place where he prayed.” He wanted to know God’s priorities before he started each day.

So instead of just planning your work and working your plan, make every effort to rest from your own ideas and ask God each day, “What is YOUR plan for today and how do YOU want to

accomplish it?” Make every effort to rest in Jesus before you start each day and activity.

Resting in Jesus “during”...

Resting in Jesus “during” means distrusting your own abilities, intellect, strength, etc. and instead trusting God to provide all that you need for the task at hand.

Many of you here today are mothers or fathers. We all know how difficult it is to raise our kids today. So how do you rest during your parenting? Like I said earlier, you must learn to rest from YOUR work. One way to rest in parenting is to tell God, “I’m not adequate to raise these kids or be the kind of mom or dad they need me to be. I want you, Lord Jesus, to raise these kids. Take control of my body, my mind and everything I am and be in me what these kids need today.” Then

by faith, start trusting Jesus to do in you what you just asked him to do and then, moment by moment, let him parent your children through you.

Let me talk to some of you professionals out there. Some of you have been doing your job for many years. By now, you can probably do your job in your sleep, blindfolded, with one hand tied behind your back. You are extremely confident in what you do. You have a different challenge. For you, resting in Jesus during your job means to resist the temptation to say, “I can do this!” Instead, resting means forsaking your overconfidence and resting in Jesus to be the kind of teacher, mechanic, attorney, salesperson, office worker, or policeman that God wants you to be. There are many things that will tempt us to live by our experience, to live by our feelings or to live

by abilities. But we must make every effort to remember what is repeated again and again in Scripture, “The just shall live by faith.” Our faith must be in Jesus’ and his work, not our own.

Resting in Jesus “after”...

“Resting in Jesus after” means to learn to trust and accept God’s outcomes regardless if they meet all our expectations. Sometimes things don’t go as planned but that doesn’t mean God’s will wasn’t accomplished. God’s ways aren’t always our ways. We must be careful not to second guess God or question his goodness when things turn out differently than we planned or our dreams aren’t realized.

“Resting in Jesus after” also means accepting God’s forgiveness after we sin or make mistakes. Some of us can’t rest when we make mistakes

because we beat ourselves up or fear God's punishment. While sin does have consequences, those who follow Jesus must always remember that "as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our sins from us" The blood of Christ covers all our sins, past, present and future. So make every effort to rest knowing that God's forgiveness is new every morning. Great is his faithfulness

So how are you doing in the area of rest? Are you resting before, during, after? Is your whole life characterized by rest?

Conclusion

As we draw this message to a close today, the band is going to sing a song about rest. As they play, listen carefully to these words. "Have you been standing on your own feet too long? Let this

old life crumble, let it fade.”

Friends it’s time to let this old life of self-reliance crumble. It’s time to let it fade. Today is the day to enter into a new life, a life characterized by rest. The secret of Christian life is to cease from dependence on our own activity, and to rest in the work of the one who dwells within. Let us live by the labor of Another. Let us rest from our own work and live by the labor of Jesus Christ who died, was buried and rose again on our behalf. This is the essence of spiritual rest. Let’s pray.

SONG: “Let it Fade”

CLOSING COMMENTS

Next series starting next week “A Royal Blue Christmas” (invite your friends)!

We are also continuing to prepare for our Celebration of Christmas event. We need volunteers. See the signup table in the Commons.

Finally, membership class is next Sunday. Use communication card or go to NHCC website and sign up under the Events tab/membership.