

Sustain
Human Beings (not Human Doings)
October 23/24, 2010

Setup song, “Overkill”

Drama: Beach Rest

Introduction: Oxymorons

How many of you know what an Oxymoron is? It’s a group of words or phrases that have internal disagreements or are considered exact opposites when used together. I’ve compiled a list of some of my favorite oxymorons.

- **Jumbo shrimp**
- **Pretty ugly**
- **Clearly misunderstood**
- **Now then (which is it? Now or then?)**
- **Aunt Jemima Light (have you seen the picture of Aunt Jemima?)**
- **Boneless Ribs (didn’t know there was such a thing)**
- **Sanitary landfill (let me know the next time you find one!)**
- **Microsoft Works (finally, for all of you Mac lovers)**

There’s another oxymoron I want to introduce to you today. It ties in nicely with our topic for today. Here it is:

We must WORK to REST

I know this idea sounds a little crazy at first because most of us would say we don’t have a problem relaxing. In fact, some of us have earned PHD’s in this area. That’s why we are called ...

COUCH POTATOES, DO-NOTHINGS or LAZY BUMS.

Can I get a witness? Now if you listened carefully to my last oxymoron, you would have noticed that I didn’t say we need to WORK TO RELAX. I said we need to WORK TO REST. Relaxing is easy, but according to the bible, rest is something we must work at. Notice what the Scriptures say in Hebrews 4:

There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest...

Heb.4:9-11 NIV

Now it’s obvious from this passage that the kind of rest he’s referring isn’t just physical rest. If that’s all he was talking about, he wouldn’t have to tell us to work at it. No, the kind of rest he’s referring to here is called “sabbath rest”. It’s a special kind of rest that all of us vitally need. If Sabbath rest is what we need, then it’s very important that we understand what it is, how it works, and to make every effort to build it into our lives.

Review

Before we dig into this idea of Sabbath rest, let’s review where we’ve been the last few weeks. As you know, we are in Part II of a two-part series on emotional health. In Part I: Detox, we spent a few weeks learning how to identify and

cleanse ourselves of all the emotional sludge that weighs us down. Last week, Rick began Part II of this series we are calling “Sustain. In “Sustain”, our goal is to go one step further by learning how to develop an emotionally sustainable life. In last week message, Rick explained how important it is to *embrace the person God made you to be*. If you don’t embrace who God made you to be, you can’t live an emotionally sustainable life over the long haul.” That was last week. It’s important for me to stress that all of the messages in these last two series are built on the assumption *that we will take the time necessary to reflect on our life and to listen to God*

So here’s my first question to all of you. If we all know that taking time out to reflect and listen to God is so important, then why don’t we do it more often? I think there are at least three reasons we don’t take time out to REFLECT AND LISTEN.

The first reason is,

1. our culture doesn’t value “time out”.

Rest in general doesn't seem to come as easily or naturally to Americans as it does to people in other parts of the world.

According to the 2006 *World Almanac and Book of Facts*:

- a worker in Italy averages 42 vacation days per year.
- a worker in France: 37 days
- a worker in Germany: 35 days
- a worker in Brazil: 34 days
- a worker in the United Kingdom: 28 days
- a worker in Japan: 25 days
- a worker in America: just 13 days

In general, Americans don’t value time off from work. We live in an achievement oriented, self sufficient culture that puts more emphasis on being productive than on taking time out to rest.

The second reason why we don’t take time out to rest, reflect and listen is,

We don’t want to face “the brutal facts of our own reality.

In his best selling book, “Good to Great”, Jim Collins explains what it is that separates great companies from mediocre ones. He says, “Great companies retain absolute faith that they can and will prevail in the end, regardless of difficulties, AND at the same time confront the most brutal facts of their reality, whatever they might be.”

This idea is true for people as well. Successful people confront the brutal facts of their own reality. Unsuccessful people do not. Too often, when we are really struggling in a certain area, we’d rather bury our heads in the sand or find a way to medicate ourselves than take time out to contemplate our situation. I see people doing this all the time. I see it in myself. This aversion that some of us have to facing the cold, hard facts is another reason why we don’t take time out for rest, reflection and listening.

There’s one more reason why we struggle in the area of time outs.

When we do take “time out”, we spend it on more activity (DOING) instead of more rest and reflection (BEING).

Let's be honest. Much of our down time is spent watching TV, shopping, surfing the web, playing internet games, taking trips, going to the movies, exercising, attending sporting events and that's just my list. All of these things are forms of activity but not forms of reflection. Don't hear what I'm not saying. I'm not saying that time out for recreation is bad. But the truth is that most of these activities like the ones I listed will not create in us an emotionally sustainable life. They just can't. And if we aren't careful, we end with a life full of activity instead of a life centered on God.

We end up living "THE CRAZY LIFE". What's the crazy life? It's a life like you saw illustrated by the man named Carver in the drama. It's a life where work follows you wherever we go and so there's no real rest. It's a life full of activity where there is very little margin. And when a life has no margin, then you have overkill, like the song said. You can't sleep at night. You toss, and turn because your mind gets filled with all kinds of stuff like worry, pressure and self doubt. When these things start to happen, it's a sign that you've become a HUMAN DOING instead of HUMAN BEING. Ultimately, the wheels will come off of this kind of life because it is not emotionally sustainable over the long haul.

Let's hit pause for just a minute. Does the life I just described sound like yours? What if you aren't sure? If you're not sure, take the Pace of Life assessment in the program sometime this week. It will help you determine if you are living the crazy life or not.

How do we break the cycle of the crazy life? How do we develop an emotionally sustainable life? If we want to change, then it starts by developing a new and different rhythm for our lives...a rhythm that puts a higher priority on BEING and less of a priority on DOING. This new rhythm is what theologians call the "CENTERED LIFE". It's a life built around God and Sabbath rest. It's about developing a different rhythm that takes of the CRAZY out of life.

The Rhythm of the CENTERED LIFE

If we are going to develop a CENTERED LIFE built around BEING instead of a DOING, then we must begin by laying a new foundation. The foundation for a CENTERED LIFE begins with this fundamental principle:

Living flows from REST.

This principle implies that we can't learn how to live properly until we learn how to rest properly because living flows from rest. When we live out of rest, our lives won't become so overloaded or out of balance. Living out of rest is the exact opposite of the crazy life. The CRAZY LIFE is built around a rhythm were living flows from activity or work. In the CRAZY LIFE the rhythm is work hard, play hard, and then rest.

But in a CENTERED LIFE, rest comes first, and work flows out of rest, not the other way around.

There's no better illustration of the primacy of rest than the account of Mary & Martha in Luke 10. In this story, two sisters named Martha and Mary invite Jesus over for a visit. When Jesus arrives, the two sisters respond quite differently to his presence in their home.

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her." Luke 10:38-41 NIV

Mary sat at the feet of Jesus and listened as he talked, but Martha objected to the fact that she was left with all the work. Jesus told Martha not to worry about the small things, but to concentrate on what was important. The point Jesus was trying to make was that spending time with Him was more important than getting many things done or doing all things well. He wasn't saying to Martha that work was unimportant. He was just saying that spending time with him was more important. He was emphasizing that work, activity and life flow from rest, not the other way around. When we make this idea of REST a priority in our lives, it changes everything. It changes the way we look at each day. It changes the way we look at each week and it even changes the way we relate to God.

Let's look first to see how the priority of REST changes the way we look at each day.

If we are going to build this idea of Sabbath Rest into our lives, then we need to begin by developing a new rhythm for each day. In order for us to develop a new daily rhythm, then we need to start by going back to the beginning, the beginning of time that is, when God first created the world in which we now live in. When time began and God created the very first day, he definitely had the concept of Sabbath rest in mind.

When the Hebrew people developed their daily routine, they also did so with God's creative rhythm in mind. Let me show how the Hebrew day differs for our concept of a typical day.

In chapter 1 of the book of Genesis, we find the account of the first seven days of creation. On day 1, the bible says, God began his creative work

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good and He separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night."

And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day. Genesis 1:3-5 NIV

Each creative day began with evening and ended with morning. That was God's rhythm. He kept that same rhythm during all six days of creation.

Now the Hebrews constructed their day to mirror God's daily rhythm. Their day began at 6pm in the evening and ended a 6am in the morning. This "evening to morning" rhythm was the Hebrew understanding a typical day, but it is definitely not ours. In fact, it's exactly opposite of how we construct our day.

Our day begins with the alarm clock blasting us out of bed in the early morning hours, then work like crazy and finally our day ends, not with evening, but when we turn off the lights late at night around 10 or 11pm. Our day begins with

morning and ends late at night. Since this early morning/late night rhythm is so ingrained in us, it's hard for us to imagine how to live can be viewed any other way. Yet, the Hebrew lived by a different rhythm...a rhythm where REST (evening) preceded WORK (morning).

I like the way Eugene Peterson describes the uniqueness of God's daily rhythm for life:

Day is the basic unit of God's creative work; evening is the beginning of that day. It is the onset of God speaking light, stars, earth, vegetation, animals, man, woman into being. But it is also the time when we quit our activity and go to sleep. When it is evening, 'I lay me down to sleep and pray the Lord my soul to keep' and drift off into semi consciousness... a state in which I am absolutely nonproductive and have no cash value. In the evening, God begins, without our help, his creative day. In the morning, God calls us to enjoy and share and develop the work he initiated.

Let me show you a picture that illustrates what Eugene Peterson is talking about.

HEBREW DAY picture

Evening is the beginning of the day (not morning). Notice that evening is a time for relationships and rest (not for work). God works while I'm asleep (not just when I'm awake). In fact, God's work precedes my work and guides my daily agenda. Each day has built-in boundaries: a time to relate & rest (evening) and a time to work (daytime).

Even King David, in Psalm 127, stressed the importance of living by God's rhythm instead of the CRAZY LIFE.

It is vain for you to rise early, come home late, and work so hard for your food. Yes, he can provide for those whom he loves even when they sleep. Psalm 127:2 NET

Now what can we learn from the concept of the Hebrew day? I think it is this: that rest comes before work and that God is working to provide for our needs even when we are not. This is what it looks like when we are living out of rest. When live out of rest in our daily lives, our lives are more centered and emotionally sustainable over the long haul.

Now let's look at how the priority of Rest changes the way we look at each week

God has a rhythm for each week in the same way that he has a rhythm for each day. During the first week of creation, God worked for six days and on the seventh, the bible says, God rested for all his work. The Hebrews mirrored God's rhythm by setting apart a special day of rest in their week. Their day of rest is called "Sabbath". Rather than explain the details of Sabbath to all of you, I decided to let someone else do the talking for a couple of minutes. Let's watch.

Video: "1 Outta 7"

Let's recap some of the main point from the video. First, Sabbath was a special day set apart at the end of the work week that mirrored God's creative pattern: work six days, rest one. Second, Moses codified the concept of Sabbath as part of the 10 commandments. Third, Sabbath is when we nurture our relationship with God by listening to his Word, reflecting on what he's saying to us and responding back to him in prayer.

Unfortunately, our culture has misunderstood the true meaning of Sabbath. We have "trivialized" Sabbath by calling it a day off. Eugene Peterson has this to say:

“We view the purpose of Sabbath as an opportunity to restore strength, increase motivation, reward effort and keep performance incentives high. ...Sabbath for us means quit. Stop. Take a break. Cool it. The word itself has nothing devout or holy in it. We see it as a word about time, what we usually call wasting time.”

Sabbath isn't just about ceasing from work. That alone doesn't make it "holy". Sabbath is also about worshipping God and developing our relationship with him. I know that weekly Sabbath keeping feels like an interruption or interference with our normal routine. But God designed it that way. Why? Because

Sabbath-keeping challenges our assumptions that our daily work is indispensable in making the world go round.

We think that if we don't work all the time, we can't be successful. That's not true. Sabbath keeping challenges that assumption. Truett Cathy, the founder of Chick-fil-A restaurants is a successful businessman, but he is even better known for letting his faith guide his business operation. His Chick-fil-A restaurants have been closed on Sundays since 1948. He is CEO over nearly 1,000 Chick-fil-A restaurants, but he doesn't mind losing millions of dollars of business in honor of Sabbath. He gets it. He understands that his daily work isn't what makes the world go round. Sabbath keeping reminds weekly that God is our provider, not us.

When we stop our work each week, we remind ourselves that we are not HUMAN DOINGS, we are HUMAN BEINGS. And if we ever hope to create an emotionally sustainable life, we must prioritize Sabbath-keeping into our weekly schedules. Now maybe your work schedule doesn't allow you to take a Sabbath on the weekends. Maybe your Sabbath will land on some other day of the week. My Sabbath is actually Friday because that's the only day I'm not actually scheduled to work. But regardless which day you pick, make Sabbath keeping a priority.

Finally, let's look at how the Priority of Rest changes the way we view our relationship with God.

When we make rest a priority and learn to live out of that rest, it radically alters how we relate to God. Unfortunately, relating to God from a position of rest is not something that comes natural to us. From the moment of our birth, the world bombards us with a false concept of our own self sufficiency. We are told that we have what it takes, or, if we do not have it now, we can find it somewhere. We are told that we can educate ourselves, we can acquire more information, we can develop new skills, AND when we get this done, we will have what it takes to be what we want to be.

But here's the real truth. In God's design for living, where everything flows from rest and not from self effort, we discover that.

We do not have what it takes to live the Christian life, and we never did have. The only one who can live the Christian life is Jesus Christ. Therefore, Jesus goal is to reproduce his life in us.

When we grasp this idea that we don't have what it takes to live the Christian life, then our relationship with God changes from one of work to one of rest. Instead of working for him, we learn to rest in him.

Our part in this new rhythm of rest is to bring everything to him, to depend on him to meet every situation and to trust him to perform every activity.

In other words, our part is to cease from our own labors and rest solely in him. That's how the priority of rest changes the way we view our relationship with God. When we prioritize Sabbath rest, we learn to live each moment out of our lives out of rest. We stop relying on our own efforts and we lean on Jesus to accomplish extraordinary things through our ordinary words and deeds. This is what it means to live the CENTERED LIFE...the Christ CENTERED LIFE. It's not up to us anymore and it never was.

Summary and Conclusion

As we close out our time today, I'm going to pray and then Mike and the band are going to lead us in a closing song. But before I pray, I want to leave you with this final thought: If we ever hope to live an emotionally sustainable life, we must take the time necessary to reflect on your life and to listen to God. The way we can do that is by prioritizing this idea of Sabbath rest into your daily and weekly lives. Mary understood the importance of Sabbath rest. That's why she sat at the feet of Jesus. Let that be true of us as well. Let's pray.