

Sabbath: A Rhythm Of Release

Deuteronomy 5:1-21

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Last May, the Times of London reported the following -

What would cause an innocent woman to welcome time behind bars? According to Maria Brunner, all it takes is her "lazy" husband and "demanding" children.

Brunner's husband is unemployed, so she supports their three young children by cleaning other people's houses. Even without a job, her husband managed to run up quite a number of unpaid parking tickets. The bill totals nearly \$5,000. Mr. Brunner kept the tickets a secret from his wife, but as the owner of the vehicle, she is responsible. Maria cannot pay the fine, and unless her husband can come up with the money, she will spend three months behind bars.

Maria's reaction? "I've had enough of scraping a living for the family! As long as I get food and a hot shower every day, I don't mind being sent to jail. I can finally get some rest and relaxation."

Police reported that when they went to arrest Maria, "she seemed really happy to see us, and repeatedly thanked us for arresting her." While most people taken into custody hide their heads in shame, Maria "smiled and waved as she was driven off to jail."

Perhaps for some of you this sounds a little far-fetched.

On the other hand, I wonder how many of you are quietly thinking, "*Sign me up!*"

A recent pole showed the following responses. Percentage of people who say they:

Need more fun: 68

Need a long vacation: 67

Often feel stressed: 66

Feel time is crunched: 60

Want less work, more play: 51

Feel pressured to succeed: 49

Feel overwhelmed: 48

Lori Joseph and Bob Laird, "Americans Working Too Hard," USA Today Snapshots; source: Hilton Generational Time Survey of 1,220

No wonder Canadians consume over 3 billion aspirin tablets per year!

Perhaps you're feeling that your life is caught, dragged along by the insane pace of life today - dragging you along like Tattoo the basset hound.

Tattoo, who lives with his owner in Tacoma, WA, didn't intend to go for an evening run, but when his owner shut the dog's leash in the car door and took off for a drive with Tattoo still outside the vehicle, he had no choice.

Motorcycle officer Terry Filbert noticed a passing vehicle with something dragging behind it: it was "the basset hound picking [up his feet] and putting them down as fast as he could." He chased the car to a stop. Tattoo was rescued, but not before the dog had reached a speed of 20 to 25 miles per hour, rolling over several times.

Are you feeling that you're caught in some sort of relentless race, overworked, pressured and stressed?

Here's a quick almost scientific test that was emailed to me recently -

Can you spot any differences between these two dolphins? If not, perhaps you're in need of a good long rest.

If any of this resonates, join me in thanking God for Sabbath. Thank our Heavenly Father for including the following in the 10 Commandments -

Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days you shall labour and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work.... (Deut 5:12-14)

Three cheers for Sabbath - for time to slow down, to back away from the pressures of life that are constantly thrust at you. Over the last few weeks we've been considering various aspects of Sabbath living from a Christian point of view. Today's element -

seeing Sabbath as a time for **release**

being set free from what challenges and pressures and burdens and sometimes almost enslaves you.

Sabbath - a time for **release**.

William H. Hinson tells us why animal trainers carry a stool when they go into a cage of lions. They have their whips, of course, and their pistols are at their sides. But invariably they also carry a stool. Hinson says it is the most important tool of the trainer. He holds the stool by the back and thrusts the legs toward the face of the wild animal. Those who know maintain that the animal tries to focus on all four legs at once. In the attempt to focus on all four, a kind of paralysis overwhelms the animal, and it becomes tame, weak, and disabled because its attention is fragmented.

[John Maxwell; Developing the Leader within You, (Thomas Nelson, 1993), p. 31]

Our lives can become paralyzed when we've got too much happening. And sometimes we've got to let go of stuff, of commitments, of activities.
Just let it go.

Sabbath is a weekly rhythm of taking our hands off the controls, and stepping off of the treadmill.
It'd divinely mandated pause time.
Stop time.
Rest time.
Take a breath time.

The reality is that none of us are able to see our lives clearly when we're in the middle of the crazy rush. We can only understand how crazy things are when we back away from the situation. Often that doesn't happen until **after**. And we look back and say, "*Were we crazy, or what? Why did we get so involved way over our heads?*"

Sabbath gives us a chance to step back and have a look on a weekly basis.

Are you taking advantage of this God-given opportunity?

Sabbath - God's pressure release valve for your life and mine.
Allowing us to practice a rhythm of release.

But not **just** you and me.
Sabbath is also meant as a time of release for others.
For us to seek release for others.

Sabbath - It's spoken of in the 10 commandments.
We read the version from Deuteronomy.
This is the second time that the Bible presents us with those famous words.
The first rendition of the 10 commandments comes in *Exodus 20*.

Bible trivia quiz time -
Can you describe the difference in the way that this commandment
observe the sabbath day and keep it holy.
is described in *Exodus* and in *Deuteronomy*?

Each provides a different reason for **why** the Sabbath should be kept.
Do you know what it is?

In Exodus we're told to keep the Sabbath because God wants us to experience a rhythm of work and rest.
Sabbath needs to be a time to pause.

That's NOT the reason given in Deuteronomy. If your bible is still open, have a look. Notice verse 14 and 15.

But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work -- you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns....

That's the command.
Now notice the reason.....

...so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.

Enjoy your time to back away from work and have a break.

But make sure that there is a time and way that those who are shackled down may also be able to experience freedom.

Seek to bring Sabbath into the lives of other people who are burdened.
Seek to bring release into the lives of the enslaved.

Bring release to people who are oppressed - that is basic Sabbath work.

It is the work of Jesus.

Listen to these words from the very first sermon that he delivered in his hometown synagogue.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has appointed me to preach Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the downtrodden will be freed from their oppressors, and that the time of the Lord's favour has come."

[Luke 4]

There is a deep, enormously important spiritual component to these words from the Saviour who came to set us free from the shackles of shame, and the blindness of sin, and the crippling burden of guilt. He came to set our souls free.

Huge truth!
Critical belief!

But there's a very strong concrete and physical dimension to these words, too.

Christ comes with all the concern of heaven for those who are weak, those who are defenceless, those without a voice, those who are the victims of injustice and oppression.

And the power of Christ in this world, power that is lived out through the lives of His followers, is to be directed towards bringing some measure of Sabbath to such people,

JUST

Like the people of ancient Israel were called to bring Sabbath rest to those who were their slaves, doing so with the memory of their own slavery clearly etched in their mind.

One of the sad facts of human life is that when we are caught in a predicament, the injustice of it stands out in sharp reality.

But when we find personal relief from the situation, sometimes we don't find the issue so pressing any longer.

Take immigration, for example.

Just about everyone worshipping here today is either an immigrant, or a child of an immigrant. And you may well remember how difficult immigrant days can be. Discrimination. Poverty. Challenges of finding work that matches your skill set. And you long for a helping hand up, or governmental policy that will at least make for a level playing field.

HOWEVER

Once we become settled, it's very easy to become part of the status quo and try to protect our own interests - even if it means pushing down or keeping out the next wave of immigrants.

One person raised that question this past week about our own congregation.

He asked, *"We're a church begun by immigrants 50 years ago. I wonder if we are open to the new wave of immigrants that are settling into our city now? Or do we want to keep them out, and remain comfortable with who we are and what we have?"*

How would you answer that question?

May God find this church with arms open wide, and **lots** of room for new immigrants, from **MANY** nationalities, to become part of this church family at Calvin - enjoying Sabbath rest for body and mind and soul as one of us.

And how is it for our nation?

Some people have condemned Australia, the continent nation founded on immigration, for having very tight immigration and refugee policies.

How different is it in Canada, today?

And not just for immigrants.

What about for refugees - for those millions of displaced people around the globe, victims of oppression and violence of all sorts.

Is our nation offering release, offering Sabbath, to them?

Do we as Christians and as a church community, offer it?

Do we lobby our government to make room for them?

CTV news did a clip this week about a woman in hiding here in Ottawa. She was raped by soldiers in her homeland, beaten and threatened with death. After escaping to Canada, her appeal for refugee status was denied. The review board is not interested in even reading her documentation. If found, she will be sent back to her home country and subject to further violation.

Right now there's a refugee family from Iran who desperately long to come to Canada. Calvin Church has stepped forward to sponsor them. But they're caught in a diplomatic black hole. And are threatened with an unjust return to Iran and a very dangerous future. What will happen to them?

Our Christian Reformed World Relief organization takes very seriously the words of Jesus -

I assure you, whatever you do to one of the least of these you do to me! (Mt 25:40)

And they advocate on our behalf for rights of refugees.

They develop sponsorship programmes.

And they're calling for our involvement.

I thank God for the leadership of our local deacons in guiding this congregation to involvement in refugee sponsorship.

And in the name of Jesus I challenge each of us to consider what we're willing to say or not say, to do or not do, on behalf of the millions caught, poor, and without a voice in the world.

How are we willing to share the grace gift of Sabbath -

the wonder of God's release?