

## A Sabbath People In a Restless World

### *Deuteronomy 5: 12-15*

Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. 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, 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.

According to the rabbis, the Sabbath officially begins when three stars are visible in the sky. On Friday evening as the sun folds into the horizon, three stars—a Trinity constellation—slowly emerges to announce the Sabbath's beginning. Like mother ringing the dinner bell from the front porch—*ding ding ding*—announcing it's "*Time to eat!*" Or like the roosters crow: *cock-a-doodle-do* announcing that it's—"*Time to begin the day.*" Three stars—a Trinity of stars—step through dusk's veil to announce: "*Come all who are weary, it is finally time to rest.*"

Where do we find the sacred time for rest? Now I'm not talking about our sleep cycles, or Blue laws, or about what we do during our "downtime." I'm wondering what real Sabbath—*sacred downtime*—looks like for people like us who function in a world where there is literally no time to rest. Seriously, who has the time when we have Mount Dirty Laundry looking like it is about to erupt in the corner of the bedroom? Who has the time when the Do-It-Yourself home improvement project is just begging us to take it on—which will consist of at least five separate trips to Home Depot? How is there time to rest when there are sporting tournaments on weekends and sick spouses who need to be cared for? When there are kiddos and pets that need our constant attention, and cars that need tune ups. Then you come to church. Home of all those committee meetings and sermons which try to inspire us to keep doing more, when really we just want to tell the preacher that we are already doing the best we can. Add it all up and it is enough to make us crazy—or at least tired-to-the-bone exhausted!

So some of us say, we will look forward to retirement. But we've seen those who are retired and, to be honest, restful isn't the word that comes to mind. Some of us say, vacations are when we can rest. But if you are anything like us, traveling in the minivan for ten hours with a handful of children whose bums are getting sore after hour number two hardly constitutes as a "vacation." So some of us shrug our shoulders and say, ah, we can rest when we are dead. Really?! As if that's the best option? We. Are. Busy. At jobs. At home. At church. I mean, seriously who has the time for rest in our over-committed, overwhelmed, over-driven world?

But here is the thing: these patterns of perpetual motion we constantly find ourselves in have created a culture of anxiety. An anxiety which may remain acute for a season, but it eventually becomes chronic; and then it spreads the more and more our busy-bee behaviors are reinforced. We might begin to feel these warning signs of the anxiety infiltrate our bodies in the following ways:

- 1) We start to feel empty inside or without purpose if we aren't always doing something.
- 2) When we find ourselves resting we have a negative motivational speaker in our heads saying, "Come on, and get up! Stop being lazy!"
- 3) We wake up at 2 a.m. ticking off a to-list or wake up from an anxiety dream where we show up to work completely unprepared and it is the most humiliating feeling in the world.
- 4) When we do find the time to rest, our mind immediately begins brainstorming a list of things we finally have the time to do—like organizing the Tupperware, or scrubbing the baseboards with a toothbrush, or training for a marathon, or even pulling weeds in the garden. All good things, but aren't we simply trading in one type of busyness for another?

All of these have certainly happened to me, and it makes it practically impossible to even consider what practicing Sabbath looks like. Because the anxiety is like an oppressive weather pattern whose pressure keeps hovering over us.

Perhaps you've seen this chronic anxiety spreading culturally through the phenomenon of the cell phone. There is even a new anxiety disorder called "Telepressure." People who suffer from Telepressure keep feeling the need to check their cellphones every couple of minutes out of nothing other than habit. "Did I get a new email?" "Did someone respond to my text?" "Has someone 'liked' my Facebook post yet?" If we doubt it, all we have to do is look over at the driver next to us the next time we are at the stoplight and you will probably see them looking down toward their lap checking that small handheld device—if you happen to pull up next to your pastor you might even see him doing it. We live in a society who has engrained in us the value of keeping busy: that we are to be a driven people patterned in the image of productivity and purpose. But it has cultivated an anxious people whose identity is based on what we do, rather than on who we are.

So God gives a Sabbath command. The word for "Sabbath" means "to cease." Six days out of the week, we work inside the grind. But on the seventh day, we are to take a clean break from the pattern. Some theologians have called this fourth command the "hinge commandment," because it is on the Sabbath commandment which all the other nine commands swing. We will fall into the habit of creating other gods to meet our needs. We will fall into the trap of mistreating our neighbors if we do not cease from the mindset of needing to get our needs met.

Remember Israel's story:

- Where were the Jews when they received the Ten Commandments? Answer: In the wilderness at Mt. Sinai.
- Where are the Israelites coming from? Answer: Egypt.
- What was their role in Egypt? Answer: Slaves.
- How much time are slaves given to rest? Answer: None.

So as Israel stands on the brink of entering the land, Moses reminds them that God has given them a radical command to set them free from the slavery of the system: you shall observe the Sabbath. Not only you, *but also your slaves*, your animals, the strangers who come to you as immigrants. You shall not exploit them to get your needs met. You shall not exclude them to get your needs met. You shall not be an anxiety-driven people whose identity is formed by getting your needs met. For one day a week all shall rest together as equals. And Moses ends by saying: "So all may rest as you rest."

I remember when I was an intern in seminary. It was during this time when I was introduced to Marissa. Monday through Saturday Marissa was known as James. At the factory job, at home with the family she was James—the man, the husband, the co-worker. But on Sunday morning when she came to church, she was Marissa. Marissa would stroll into worship always ten minutes early to socialize, wearing a string of pearls around her neck, a formal dress, and loud plum purple pumps. It was amazing to me that it was at the church where Marissa felt safe to unleash her true feminine self fully and authentically. Something she couldn't do anywhere else in the world. During prayers one Sunday Marissa stood up, faced the congregation and with her mascara running she said, "You know, Monday through Saturday I have to meet the world's expectations. But on Sunday mornings, when I come here, I can finally feel my soul at rest." The room erupted in celebration. To be honest, it was the first time in a long time my soul felt at rest in a church too.

- In a world where the 24/7 news cycle doesn't cease we need Sabbath people who can break the pattern. Maybe by turning off the cell phone or refusing to check email.
- In a world where the anxiety to do more or be more doesn't cease we need Sabbath people who let their hearts expand in awe and wonder, absorbing the miracle of what it means just to be here.
- In a world where exclusion and injustice will not cease, we need Sabbath people whose lives *hinge* on honoring *sacred downtime*, where we remember the God who offer us rest, so others can be at rest too.

Like those three stars—that Trinity constellation—in dusk's evening sky. We are an emerging presence as the darkness falls announcing: "Come all who are weary, it is finally time to rest."