

Exodus 20:8-11

Sabbath - #2 in a series on Wholeness

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This month our topic is Wholeness. This month we think how to really emulate Jesus so much that we discover how to make the most of life. How do we achieve our potential in this earthly journey we are on? One of the things that made Jesus such a powerful example of a magnificent life was that he somehow figured out how to be an authentic person who used his gifts for the glory of God. He figured out how to be the best Jesus he could be. His example helps us to be the best people that we can be. When we follow in his footsteps, we strive to live with the same wisdom that made him whole, and at home in the world.

Jesus made the most of the time he had on this earth. What is it that makes life fulfilling? How do you find happiness? How do we live in such a way that we find the deep rivers of purpose here on earth? How do you know what to pursue, what matters most and what is just a temptation, or a distraction? The topics in this series on wholeness are integrity, balance, gratitude and spirituality. Last week we talked about integrity and today I will address balance.

We know how to do full-throttle. We know how to work, but we have trouble resting.

So this topic could not be more timely. Our scripture lesson comes from the 10 Commandments. The fourth commandment says remember the Sabbath to keep it holy. It is interesting that this is the only commandment which starts with the word "Remember". What is it that God is telling us here? And what do we need to remember?

In the first place –

When God says remember the Sabbath, God is telling us to remember the rhythm of life. God says, remember the story of creation. Remember that I worked for six days to call forth life from the earth. In that week of time I made the heavens and the earth, the plants, the animals and the human beings. But then on the seventh day I rested.

God says; remember that life is not random. It is not a full throttle operation. God did not barrel through creation and move on to another project. God rested. God established a rhythm to life. Don't forget that life has a rhythm. You can run through life but you will grow weary. You need rest. We have forgotten the whole concept of Sabbath.

You have all heard the statistics. CNNMoney ran an article this summer reporting on the lack of vacation time in this country. The United States is one of the few developed countries that does not require that companies offer workers paid vacations. In statistics for workers that have worked at the same company for 10 years the US is very different from other nations. With ten years' experience you get 28 days paid vacation in the United Kingdom. You get 20 days' vacation in Germany of Japan. You get 10 days' vacation in China. In the US there is no guarantee you will get any time off. Companies are not required to give vacations.<sup>1</sup> In 2011, 57% of Americans had on average 11 unused vacation days. That comes to 70% of their time off was not taken. People explained that they had no back up, so vacation time would result in more work when they returned. Others explained that they feared they might lose their jobs in this economy if they left for very long. So what these statistics describe is a society which is very ambivalent about balance.

Music without rests is continuous sound. That is just noise. Good music is the delightful interplay of notes and rests. The rhythm of the music is a calculus of stopping and starting that creates the tune and the layers of harmonies. Without rests, there is no music. Good singers understand the

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<sup>1</sup> "Vacation, No thanks boss." [CNN Money.com](http://CNNMoney.com) May 18, 2012

importance of Sabbath. They will tell you that the voice is an instrument which does not work at its peak if the singers do not get enough rest. Rest is the gift that allows singers to do their best.

Yesterday Heike travelled to New Hampshire to take a prayer shawl and many cards from you and the Sunday school children for our oldest member. Betty Brougham celebrates her 100 birthday this week and the party was yesterday. Many of you remember Betty but lots of you don't know her because she has not been to church for 6-7 years. She is an elegant woman, who had worked for 40 years in a bank in Boston. She appreciates the benefits of routine. She worked hard at the bank, and she loves the Red Sox and has been going to their games since the 1930's. She is a good cook, known for her pies, and she spent time each year doing beautiful needlework for the Church Fair. Every Sunday Betty would arrive at 9:55 for worship and sit in the same seat. There are many things that contribute to longevity, but finding your rhythm in life is a key to wholesome living. Betty did not rush through life; her life was always full, and balanced. She observed the Sabbath- not just Sunday worship but she took time to rest.

If we forget the Sabbath all the days become a blur. The Sabbath gives order and meaning to life.

Remember the rhythm of life.

Finally, Remember that the Sabbath is a gift. It is easy to justify working 7 days a week. If we are honest sometimes we take a kind of perverse pride in the practice. We feel justified and self-righteous when we work constantly. We brag to ourselves about how hard we work. It is seductive to work all the time.

The Sabbath restored the balance of creation. In Jewish homes you could not make a fire, so women did not have to cook, and toil over the fire. They served cold cuts, and couples sat as equals in their home. Children did not have to work in the field so they could play, and the whole family re-established its bonds. Servants rested and the animals relaxed from their harnesses. On the Sabbath

equality was restored to the household, as each creature acknowledged his or her fatigue. God never expected animals to work until they dropped, or people to push ourselves until we got sick.

One of the greatest rabbis of the twentieth century was Abraham Joshua Heschel. In his book entitled Sabbath, he writes about the importance of time. When we ride on a train and see the landscape rushing by we assume that we are still and the world is rushing by. That is how life is too. We think we are still but we are moving through time, and time is the gift that God gives to us. Time is not something to be filled up, lest we grow bored. It is not something to be manipulated, managed or stretched thin. It is a gift.

When I put things together I open the box and spread all the parts on the floor. I organize the parts and get the tools, but often I try to put the toy or appliance together in my head before I consult the directions. For whatever reason it seems easier to take a stab at it on my own before I consult the plans. Sometimes I would get things together and a piece was left over. Sometimes it would last for a while, but without all the pieces in place, it would never work optimally. Over the years I have learned the hard way that things work much better if I go to the directions before I start, in earnest. I can use my own intuition but I also need to consult with the manual, and then I produce something that will work with maximum efficiency. Without those instructions, things don't always fit right. These 10 Commandments are like the instructions for life.

These lives we have, so full, so overflowing with options, jam-packed with travel, work, sports, music, and school. No wonder we are exhausted. We tell ourselves we are offering our children everything and we are. We are in danger of offering them everything except balance, everything except rest and relaxation. We tell ourselves the enemy is boredom, but boredom is the mother of creativity, the father of ingenuity. God rested. God may not have needed to rest but God wanted to rest. When

you have trouble saying “No” to one more thing, think of the fact that God rested. So who do you think you are?

Rabbi Heschel said, Labor is a craft but perfect rest is an art. It is the result of an accord of body, mind and imagination. The Sabbath is a palace in time, a cathedral. We think that creation was an act that happened once and forever, but ...each moment is a new act of creation. Time is God’s gift. Time is God’s song. All week we work, satisfying life goals, but on the Sabbath we share the holiness of time. Even when the soul is seared, even when prayer cannot come from our tightened throats, the clean silent rest of the Sabbath leads us to the realm of peace; it leads us to an awareness of eternity. There are few ideas so powerful in all of human history. When many of our cherished theories pass away in shred, this one will survive- the Sabbath.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Heschel, Abraham Joshua, The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man, New York: Straus Giroux, 2005 epilogue p. 101