

Renewing and Refreshing in Good's Goodness
April 8, 2018

Imagine with me arriving at church one morning and seeing with some kind spirit vision you'd never had before.

You first notice this strange ability when you see a visitor laboring toward the church while lugging heavy baggage in each hand.

Then you see a couple struggling to get out of their car, tugging and pulling to get old scuffed baggage out, which they then drag up the sidewalk.

There's the pastor sitting up front, but even he looks exhausted by the baggage he's been carrying.

Then a surprise speaker walks to the pulpit – and it turns out to be Jesus himself.

He looks right at you and says,
Matthew 11:28-30 (The Message) *"Are you tired? Are you worn out? Are you burned out?"*

He pauses, then turns to some other people and continues,

"Come to me! Get away with me, and you'll recover your life. And I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me – watch how I do it."

So, what does that mean?

This is what he says next: *"Learn the unforced rhythms of grace."*

You might circle that sentence: *Learn the unforced rhythms of grace.*

Then Jesus says,

"I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."

When Jesus reappeared after his Resurrection, he didn't talk about the mysteries of the other side, of angels ministering to him, or of the triumphant feeling of defeating death.

No.

He continued the lessons of the previous three years – how live in sync with the life-giving ways of God – what he called the Kingdom of God.

Easter Sunday celebrated the resurrection of Jesus, but that's only the beginning of the Good News, so now we are looking at what that means for the other days of our lives.

God is good on Easter Sunday, and also on Monday and Tuesday and so on.

But here's the key: We must have ears to hear, eyes to see, and the willingness to live in-sync with the Kingdom life Jesus offers.

Today we are going to learn about the renewal and refreshment that come from the kind of balanced life the Bible prescribes.

Each of us is going home this afternoon, and consciously or not we're going to make a series of decisions that will determine our future.

Your future – the quality of your life – is made one small choice at a time.

Mostly we don't take the time to be deliberate and wise, we just go along doing what we've always done... but eventually our human life wraps up and then we're out of time.

Today I want to talk about getting our life back into balance with rest and renewal while we still can.

Most of us have gotten way off balance, and there's some alarming data about Americans' stress brought about by lack of sleep and by overwork.

I know you've heard much of this, but since these are primary causes of both physical and emotional disease, let me remind you of just a couple things.

First, our consumption of TV, computer games and Internet into late hours has robbed us of sleep.

A century ago, the average American slept 9-hours a night, but today we sleep, on average, 6.8 hours, with four out of ten adults trying to get by on fewer than six.

Listen, that is just not how God designed our brains and bodies.

In fact, lack of sleep has fueled a rise in everything from depression to diabetes, from workplace and traffic accidents to cancer and cardiovascular disease.

Your creativity, your relationships, your school grades, your ability to retain information, and your health all suffer when you routinely squeeze an extra hour or two out of your day.

To give life our best requires rest.

You know, sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is to go to bed.

And our work schedules have gotten crazy.

About $\frac{3}{4}$ of Americans work more than 40-hours per week.

That's 137 hours per year more than Japanese, 260 more than British and 499 more than French workers.

Which doesn't mean we are the most productive.

In Norway, for example, the average workweek is about 19% less than ours, yet their productivity is 19% higher.

There're a lot of reasons behind this, including erosion of union benefits, and the move to insecure contract jobs rather than long-term positions.

A lot people are juggling multiple jobs and working like mad in hopes that they won't be replaced.

But beyond that, we Americans have a strong Puritan work ethic woven into our DNA – plus an insatiable materialist hunger – are fueling our overwork.

The fact is that over half (54%) of American workers only use about half of their holiday and vacation time.

And a big percentage of them take work with them on days off and vacations.

We'd rather work than play.

We choose employment over enjoyment.

So maybe you're thinking, well I'm retired so this doesn't pertain to me.

But it does.

Being busy is a badge of honor that you may feel has been stripped from you.

And, even if you aren't working now you still carry the ethics of our workaholic culture in you.

Our culture wants you to believe that your worth comes from your work.

So, whether on vacation, on disability or retired, you may still feel guilty when you're not busy and producing.

Which, by the way, is part of why so many men die within a few years of retiring.

This is a big issue, so listen to this:

Adjusting for health variables, there's an 11% greater risk of dying sooner among early retirees than those who work past age 65.

When we aren't producing and providing, so we lose our sense of value.

We base our worth on our work.

You meet a stranger and what's the first or second thing you ask each other?

“What do you do?”

We're really asking is, “Where do you rank in our world?”

Which would you rather be able to answer: I'm a ditch digger or I'm a doctor?

But, look, God doesn't love you any more because you're a doctor, or any less because you dig ditches.

And God doesn't stop loving you when you retire or when you are down for disability ... in fact, God has a purpose for you right now.

You wonder if God has a purpose for you?

If you're alive, He does.

As a matter of fact, your main purpose – and my main purpose – for being alive is to love God and other people.

When asked what the most important commandment in scripture is, Jesus said this:

Catch up on your e-mail and clear up you "To Do list".

No, actually he said,
Matthew 22:37-40 “*‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ ... and ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.*”

I remember a young woman coming to me a while back and asking, “But what if I don't love myself?”

This woman had been raised by a strict, demanding father, and a mother who seldom intervened to support her.

So, as so often happens in these families, she spent her early years trying to win her father's approval.

She got top grades, went to UCLA, got a graduate degree, landed a good job, but it was never enough.

So, her question touched on the big issue of her life: no matter how much she accomplished on the outside, she never felt loved on the inside.

How could she love someone else if she didn't love herself?

Her life was driven by a vain attempt to win her father's approval, and the fear of rejection.

And that's a lie prevalent in American culture: If I work really hard and I succeed at work then I am valuable.

If I don't work, if I'm not productive, then I'm of no value.

But you don't earn love, and until she felt safe and loved, she would never feel secure enough to trust Jesus and let go of her workaholism.

Maybe her father wasn't capable of showing love, but our Heavenly Father loves without condition, and it is that love she's learning to draw from.

1 John 4:19. *We love because he first loved us.*

There's the key.

God's love is an unsolicited gift, and when we experience it, then we can love ourselves and then others.

Your worth doesn't come from you work.

Your worth comes from the God who chose to create you, who longs for a relationship with you, and who died on the cross to forgive your sins and win your heart, and who now walks by your side through the Holy Spirit.

Isaiah 49:16 *See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.*

Sometimes when people get married they tattoo one another's names on their bodies, so maybe a better metaphor today would be that God tattooed your name on his arm ... He loves you that much.

If I'm insecure about myself, then I might try to amass wealth to prove that I'm ok.

You know what?

If you aren't careful, you'll spend the first half of your life giving up your health in overwork in order to get wealth, but in the second half, you spend all that wealth trying to get healthy again.

Again, nothing new.

Here's what was written in King Solomon's time:

Proverbs 23:4-5 Don't wear yourself out trying to get rich; restrain yourself! Riches disappear in the blink of an eye; wealth sprouts wings and flies off into the wild blue yonder.

Apparently, America's founding fathers wanted you to remember this verse because they put an eagle on every dollar bill.

Your value doesn't come from your valuables.

Your self-worth doesn't come from your net worth.

Remember those bumper stickers that said, "He who dies with the most toys wins?"

We need a replacement that says, "He who dies with the most toys still dies, and probably killed his relationships along the way."

Now, of course, materialism isn't a uniquely American problem; it goes way back to Biblical times.

Ecclesiastes 6:7. We work to feed our appetites, but meanwhile our souls go hungry.

When you're facing your final hours of life, when there are no "do-overs", what are you going to see as your most precious moments?

Will it be the new BMW or the time you spent with a loved one?

Will it be your biggest screen TV, top score on a video game, or your time bringing a meal to someone who is home-bound?

Will it be that 15lb carbon fiber bicycle, or wait, that isn't a fair question.

I've been part of many funerals, and I have yet to see a hearse pulling a U-Haul trailer packed with a life's accumulated stuff.

You need to ask the question – and it is urgent: What is really important?

If we aren't clear, then we buy things we don't need with money we don't have to impress people we don't even like.

And when you come face to face with God, what is He going to ask about you?

About your big promotion?

About your number of followers on Instagram?

About your coin collection?

No.

He's going to ask about the quality of your relationships.

How you choose to spend your hours this afternoon and all week will determine the quality of your life.

Choose carefully while you can.

Some people think God smiles on them only when they're working or praying or doing spiritual things.

But did you know that God smiles on you when you rest?

If you are a parent, then I bet that some of your most precious memories are peering into your baby's crib to watch them sleep.

The most famous psalm is #23; we all know it.

You remember that it says, Vs.2) *He makes me lie down in green pastures.*

And why?

So God can *restores my soul.*

He makes me lie down ... so, unless you are resting and restoring, your body is going to take it upon itself to lie you down flat.

Sleep, and take a Sabbath day.

Taking a day away from work just for recreation, worship and relaxation is so important that God wrote it right into the Ten Commandments.

Exodus 31:15 Keep the Sabbath; it's holy to you. ... There are six days for work but the seventh day is Sabbath, pure rest, holy to GOD.

No murder.

No stealing.

No adultery.

No work on the Sabbath.

God took a day off, so should you.

And I find it helpful to call my day off “sabbath”.

It is easy to cheat on your “day off” and try to catch up on work.

But calling it “sabbath” reminds you that it is sacred and not to be compromised.

You ever go to the archery range in Woodley Park?

The bows and arrows today have come a long way from what I remember as a kid. They don't even have those little rubber suction cups on the tips any more.

But the thing then and today is that if you never unstring your bow, it loses its power.

To give life your best, you've got to rest - relieve your tension, regain your strength.

Psalm 127:2 It's useless to rise early and go to bed late, and work your worried fingers to the bone. Don't you know that God enjoys giving rest to those He loves?

So, if you found yourself with that special vision that could see burned-out people laboring under the weight of their baggage, and if you then heard Jesus speak to you, what changes would you make?

My invitation to you this week is to make those changes while you still can.