**Daily Devotions**

**August 2023**

*08-01*

“The foolish woman is loud;

she is ignorant and knows nothing.”

— Proverbs 9:13

This is the anti-wisdom, who also calls to the simple, but leads them astray. She runs rampant in our modern context, as we are bombarded daily by far more information than we can possibly process. It take concerted effort to weed out what is wisdom from what is folly. But more than anything, it takes self-honest and humility: we have to recognize when folly is telling us what we want to hear, and be willing to turn away from our own comfort and toward the often challenging truth, which requires us to actually change ourselves. Wisdom is by far the most satisfying path, but it requires effort. Folly is by far the more attractive path, but it leads only to confusion, resentment, self-righteousness, and a host of other sins, which cause harm to ourselves and others. May God give us the discernment we need to recognize what is wisdom and what is folly, and the willingness to choose the right path.

How do I discern what is wisdom and what is folly in the barrage of information I receive each day?

*08-02*

“The Lord does not let the righteous go hungry,

but he thwarts the craving of the wicked.”

— Proverbs 10:3

What are we to make of these proverbs? Some, like this one, are deeply counterintuitive to what we experience in our own context. Others actually (again, to modern eyes) seem to encourage negative behavior rather than positive. Still others contradict one another. All of them appear to be black-and-white dichotomies, when the reality of wisdom, as I understand it, is in recognizing the dialectics: the “both/ands” of truth.

Does this mean we are to judge Solomon’s “wisdom” as anything but? Do we discard them out of hand? Of course not. As with much of scripture, these proverbs are an invitation to have a conversation with the text and ask God to lead us to the wisdom that underlies even those passages which baffle us. The fact of the matter is that many of the “righteous” do go hungry, and the “wicked” get everything they want and far more than they need. So how can we glean wisdom from this in our modern context? Perhaps it is a call to action—that we are to be the hands and feet of God working to make this proverb a reality, by ensuring that no one—righteous or wicked—goes hungry.

How do I find wisdom in scripture that I find counterintuitive?

*08-03*

“A wise child loves discipline,

but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.”

— Proverbs 13:1

I was never a disciplined child. I’m not talking, here, about the kind of discipline done to another person—I have lots of mixed feelings about that, which I won’t go into here. I’m talking about the kind of discipline parents hope to develop in their children by teaching and modeling certain behavior. You know, like brushing your teeth regularly, which (I am embarrassed to admit) I did not do until I was in my 30s. It took getting into recovery for me to begin to live a highly disciplined life in a number of areas. Before that I was definitely a scoffer. Not because I didn’t believe I should be more disciplined, but because I had no idea how to be more disciplined. So out of fear, I just hunkered down into my bad habits and kept on keeping on.

I am so grateful to have the daily disciplines of my recovery program which spill over into all the areas of my life (I have amazing, healthy teeth, now, by the way).

Where is there room for more discipline in my life?

*08-04*

“A fool takes no pleasure in understanding,

but only in expressing personal opinion.”

— Proverbs 18:2

Ouch. Am I bleeding? I think I just got tagged. Seriously, though, I get to sit down and read through these nuggets of scripture, struggle with them and/or be inspired by them, and basically offer a possible way of looking at them in light our present context, as a guide for just this one day’s living in the world. And it’s all just my opinion.

On the other hand, I take enormous pleasure in understanding. I love to read scripture and discuss it with others. I listen raptly to my pastor’s excellent sermons on Sundays (and am regularly moved and inspired by her!) So while I offer these daily devotions as a tool for individual use, in whatever prayer practice you might follow each day, I would also encourage you to share your thoughts about these texts with others in your life. We learn so much about one another and about scripture when we seek to understand more deeply together.

With whom can I share my understanding of scripture and learn more about theirs?

*08-05*

“It is honorable to refrain from strife,

but every fool is quick to quarrel.”

— Proverbs 20:3

I like to be right. I mean, who doesn’t? Once upon a time, I was a pretty combative person. I would argue anyone to the mat if they didn’t agree with me. I guess, according to Proverbs, that made me a fool. I don’t deny it. There’s a wonderful saying in 12-step recovery: “It’s better to be happy than to be right.” I feel like that should be in Proverbs!

It is honorable to refrain from unnecessary strife. It’s far more important to listen to others, whether or not they agree with your way of seeing things, so that openings can be created for positive conversation rather than quarreling. In our modern context where we are so polarized, this proverb is particularly potent for us. We would do well to practice active listening with a heart of generosity.

Do I feel a need to be right? How do I work to set aside my desire to quarrel?

*08-06*

“He has made everything suitable for its time; moreover he has put a sense of past and future into their minds, yet they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.”

— Ecclesiastes 3:11

As human beings, we are boundaried by time. Our existence is bookended by it—the time we are born to the time we die. We have no real understanding of the time before or the time after. I remember as a child learning about the Civil Rights Movement and thinking it happened a million years ago, when in reality, Dr. King was assassinated a mere three years before I was born. I sometimes contemplate a future in which I am no longer alive, particularly as it pertains to my children and how they will be able to support themselves long term, and it fills me with fear. I “cannot find out what God has done from beginning to the end.”

What this requires is a deep trust that God’s got this. She was there at the beginning of all things, and she will be there at the end of all things. My finite earthly existence is what it is. I can live and move and have my being in the time allotted to me, and enjoy it to the fullest knowing that all things—all of time, all of existence—are in God’s hands.

Do I find myself anxious about time? How can I turn this over to God?

*08-07*

“That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already is; and God seeks out what has gone by.”

— Ecclesiastes 3:15

Whoa. This is deep. I’m not entirely certain of what it means, which is why it jumped out at me for a devotion. I love the opportunity to dive in and grapple with the text! I imagine the Teacher (the writer of Ecclesiastes) is keeping with the theme that life is fleeting, and that there is nothing new under the sun. So when we are overwhelmed by our current circumstances and begin to despair about the state of things, we can take comfort in the fact that, really, it’s nothing new. The specifics might be different, but people have struggled with the harsh realities of existence from the beginning of time. No matter how unique we think our particular challenges might be, they’ve all happened before. And as for our fears about the future, they are pointless because it will be nothing substantively different than the present. Again, the specifics might be different, but the realities of the human condition are consistent.

I’m not sure what it means that God seeks out what has gone by. Completed flummoxed. I will leave you with that to grapple with today.

How do I interpret this last phrase of the verse?

*08-08*

“Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help. Again, if two lie together, they keep warm; but how can one keep warm alone? And though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one. A threefold cord is not quickly broken.”

— Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

God created us to be in relationship. With God, and with one another. When God created Adam in Genesis 2, God said that it was not good for the man to be alone, and therefore created a helpmeet for him: Eve. God herself is a relationship of Mother/Father, Son, Holy Spirit, and, created in God’s image, we, too, are created to be interconnected with those around us.

I am reminded once again of the African concept of ubuntu: I am because we are. As an introvert, it can be tempting for me to think I don’t need anyone else, but the fact of the matter is that I crave connection at the very core of my being. It is in my God-given makeup.

I am grateful for all of the amazing people in my life who keep me rooted and grounded in relationship: my wonderful family, my dear friends, my recovery fellows, my church community—all these and more fulfill a need so deeply ingrained in me.

Who are the people in my life who fulfill my need for connection?

*08-09*

“The lover of money will not be satisfied with money; nor the lover of wealth, with gain. This also is vanity.”

— Ecclesiastes 5:10

Sometimes I fall into the trap of thinking if I just had inexhaustible resources, I would be perpetually happy. But there is a host of evidence that not only does money fail to provide people with happiness, but that even the wealthiest of Americans still believe they don’t have enough. Not-enough-ness is an insidious voice that gnaws at most of us at least some of the time. The Teacher made this point thousands of years before we had social scientists setting up experiments to prove it. Which just goes to show that this is something in our human makeup from the very beginning.

What is the alternative to this vanity of seeking after wealth? It is fully surrendering to God and trusting that God is the source of our security in ways that money could never be. It means staying in the moment and doing the footwork while letting go of the outcomes.

Certainly money is a necessity and serves a purpose. We just need God’s help to keep it in its right place and not succumb to the temptation to put it in the place of God.

Do I think I have enough? Why or why not?

*08-10*

“For who knows what is good for mortals while they live the few days of their vain life, which they pass like a shadow? For who can tell them what will be after them under the sun?”

— Ecclesiastes 6:12

Much of Ecclesiastes is concerned about time. Here, again, the Teacher reflects on the fleeting amount of time humans have on this earth, and on our total lack of control of what happens in the future, especially after we die.

“Who knows what is good for mortals while they live the few days of their vain life”? God knows. Once again we are called to surrender all the things we can’t control to God, and live in the moment, enjoying to the fullest the time we do have.

So many of us have plans and designs—things we want to accomplish, ways we want to leave a mark on the world, some means of ensuring a kind of immortality for ourselves. And this is vanity. The truth is that we are enough exactly as we are in this moment. Our immortality it to be found in God, not in our own efforts. We matter so much to God, are loved so much that we are free to remain present in the moment. What a blessing and a gift! If only we can accept it.

Do I feel the need to leave a legacy in this world? Why or why not?

*08-11*

“Go, eat your bread with enjoyment, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has long ago approved what you do. Let your garments always be white; do not let oil be lacking on your head. Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that are given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun.”

— Ecclesiastes 9:7-9

This idea is at the heart of Ecclesiastes. For all that the Teacher bemoans the vanity of our fleeting existence, the takeaway is that because our life is finite, we ought to enjoy to the fullest all the gifts that God gives us in the here an now. The fact of our fleeting existence in itself becomes gift, because it frees us from our insatiable desire to pursue immortality on our own terms. This is why, despite the fact that some people see this particular book as a downer, Ecclesiastes is one of my favorite books in all of scripture. It is not, in fact, depressing at all, but liberating. Because we are limited in our nature, because the world is so seemingly random, and yet because God is ultimately in charge of all that is, was, and is to come, we are absolutely liberated to be what we are—beautiful creations in God’s image—and live our days in a state of intense gratitude for all we have in the here and now. How amazing is that?

How do I live into this idea of enjoying life in the midst of the knowledge of its limitations?

*08-12*

“In the morning sow your seed, and at evening do not let your hands be idle; for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good.”

— Ecclesiastes 11:6

“Chop wood, carry water.” It’s a phrase I hear often in my recovery community. At it’s heart, it means that we have this day only in which to do what is in front of us to do. We are responsible for the footwork, God is responsible for the outcome. We are freed to stay in the moment, following the daily disciplines of our lives, trusting fully in the promise that God has our back, and is with us no matter what.

My life can be incredibly (overly) full, and it can be easy to get overwhelmed when I begin to project into the future—even a day or two into the future, never mind the long term. This passages reminds me that I can be diligent about this day’s tasks and only this day’s tasks and that is enough. It can be easier said than felt, of course. I still find myself projecting (and panicking). But I can come back and back and back again to this in-the-moment awareness of what is mine to do right now, and what is God’s to do (which is everything.)

How do I stay in the moment when I am tempted to project into the future?

*08-13*

“Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death, passion fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a raging flame.”

— Song of Solomon 8:6

God created us to be in relationship. With God, and with one another. This can take on many forms—we can at the same time be parent, child, sibling, friend, colleague, community member, and lover. Song of Solomon is a breathtaking poem about this last kind of relationship, one characterized by sexual love and passion. Sadly, the church has a long history of sexual repression, and so many of us grew up with the message that sex was somehow wrong. There’s a joke I heard once, the source of which I can’t remember, but it basically went like this: “Sex is filthy and horrible. Save it for the one you love.” Yeah.

Maybe it is our culturally ingrained discomfort with sexuality that keeps us from centering Song of Solomon in our Bible studies, or preaching on it in worship, or celebrating it as the incredible piece of scripture that it is. It’s a proclamation that God created us to be in sexual relationships, that they are good and right and beautiful, and to be celebrated!

Love and passion are a raging flame that cannot be quenched by even the fiercest floods. May we celebrate this love in our lives however we can.

What are my feelings about Song of Solomon? How have messages about sexuality in my past contributed to this?

*08-14*

“I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the wild does: do not stir up or awaken love until it is ready!”

— Song of Solomon 3:5

Fools rush in. So goes the song. It can be easy to mistake infatuation for love, momentary hormone-driven urges for depth of relationship. I love this last verse of today’s text (which is my absolute favorite passage in Song of Solomon!). After the woman goes seeking after “him whom my soul loves” all over town, and finally finds him, she urges all lovers and beloved to be patient, to not dive headlong into what might seem, in the moment, to be God’s intended relationship. Instead, we ought to wait, as she did, to find the one whom our soul loves. Our soul. Not just our bodies or our minds. The truest, deepest, most holy relationship between lovers is at the level of our souls—a connection at such depth that it transcends the physical. It takes time, and perhaps a great deal of searching, as in the poem, to find the one whom our soul loves. But the reward for our patience can be more than we could have possibly imagined.

How did I know/do I know/will I know when I have found the one whom my soul loves?

*08-15*

“Look, O daughters of Zion, at King Solomon, at the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, on the day of the gladness of his heart.”

— Song of Solomon 3:11b

“On the day of the gladness of his heart.” I love that phrase. A wedding is truly an occasion for gladness. It’s an opportunity for the community to gather and celebrate together the love of two people as they proclaim their commitment to one another. I’ve been to many weddings over the years and each has been unique and beautiful, an expression of the individual couple’s personalities. I’ve seen the bride and groom recite their own vows or use the ones in their denomination’s liturgies. I’ve seen them sing to one another. I’ve been at indoor and outdoor weddings, big and small weddings, formal and casual weddings, weddings in all seasons, thrown birdseed, blown bubbles, seen doves released, taken communion, laid hands on the couple in blessing, I could go on. But what they all have in common is this: God is at the center of them all, the source of gladness, the holy power that binds together the couple and the community. Whatever that “day of the gladness of their hearts” might look like, God is the same.

What particular wedding practice have I witness that I found particularly meaningful and why?

*08-16*

“You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride, you have ravished my heart with a glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace”

— Song of Solomon 4:9

Beauty is subjective. Those of us who live in cultures in which we are daily inundated with highly targeted messages about what constitutes beauty might doubt that. We are told from our earliest moments that only certain characteristics can be objectively construed as beauty: thinness, certain shades of skin, certain shapes of eyes, noses, cheeks, lips, certain textures of hair. We are sold an idealized image that, when we fail to live up to it, causes us to see ourselves as undesirable.

That image is a lie. Each and every one of us is created in God’s image, whole and beautiful. Each and every one of deserves to be seen and loved in the way that the groom in Song of Solomon sees his bride. Not because she is some ideal, but because he loves her. So much, in fact, that a single glance from her “ravishes” his heart. Know this, God loves you in this way, and sees you as so breathtakingly beautiful, it takes God’s breath away.

What makes me feel beautiful?

*08-17*

“You are beautiful as Tirzah, my love, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners. Turn away your eyes from me, for they overwhelm me!”

— Song of Solomon 6:4-5a

How interesting to describe the bride’s beauty as “terrible as an army with banners.” When I think about it, I have experienced moments of such beauty it has made me tremble. I can’t say I have ever faced down an army, but I imagine it would be terrifying. But I have experienced wild storms, awesome and beautiful and scary, and perhaps this is the kind of intense emotion the writer is talking about when he sees his beloved’s beauty. It’s romantic and moving to imagine finding someone so beautiful in your eyes that it moves you to such a profound emotional response. The writer of Song of Solomon seems to proclaim that God desires this for us, this total overwhelm in our relationships. Of course this kind of intensity isn’t something that you can feel and experience all the time. For humans, these things happen more at the beginning of a relationship, when it is new and we are surprised over and over again by this other person to whom we are so drawn. Eventually, a comfortable familiarity develops, and a deep, ongoing, committed love grows, which can sustain us through even those moments when our partner may drive us a little crazy. Yet even so, we can be surprised all over again and find ourselves in awe when we least expect it.

It is also worth noting that, as Song of Solomon can also be read as an allegory for God’s relationship with us, God will always maintain this level of overwhelm at our beauty, and love us madly no matter how long our relationship continues. Likewise, I am regularly blown away by God’s beauty—something which will always be as “terrible” as the wildest storm.

What experiences have moved me to this intensity of awe?

*08-18*

“How fair and pleasant you are, O loved one, delectable maiden!”

— Song of Solomon 7:6

Here the writer of Song of Solomon offers a potent physical description of his beloved’s body. It is a celebration of the gift of our embodied-ness. One might read it as reinforcement of some ideal of physical beauty to which we can never measure up, but I would invite you to imagine that every human body is beautiful, no matter what. Whether it is a human beloved or God seeing us, we can know that our physical form is delightful and brings joy to the seer.

I know it can be a hard sell. So many of us are taught explicitly or implicitly that we are unattractive or that our bodies are somehow shameful. But the truth is that God created us in God’s image. Think about that. It means that all of us in our full embodied-ness are the image of God, and therefore indescribably beautiful. When the writer of Song of Solomon writes of his beloved’s beauty, he is writing about you.

Do I see myself as beautiful? Why or why not?

*08-19*

“Make haste, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag upon the mountains of spices!”

— Song of Solomon 8:14

I am in touch with longing. I have experienced the ache of wanting to be with my beloved when time and distance have kept us apart. I have felt the intense pull of yearning for a closer relationship with God, which for me is borne out in that spiritual act of creativity. I can feel the anticipation in bride’s call to her groom to hurry home so they can be together once again. C.S. Lewis wrote of Sehnsucht, the German word for longing, as a haunting sense of yearning for some unknown thing, but which is inextricably connected with joy. In Surprised by Joy he writes, “Joy is distinct not only from pleasure in general but even from aesthetic pleasure. It must have the stab, the pang, the inconsolable longing.” This is the kind of longing I feel when I read the bride’s urging for her beloved to return to her as quickly as possible. And this is the kind of longing that in many ways makes life profoundly beautiful.

What do I most long for in my life? How does God fulfill my longing?

*08-20*

“Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you.”

— Deuteronomy 5:12

Main Idea: Rest is an act of witness to the fullness, liberation, and love of a life with God.

Have you ever noticed that the Third Commandment isn’t a commandment to rest? It’s a commandment to observe a time of rest. To differentiate and keep holy a time of rest. That’s a subtle distinction, but very important, because it tells us why rest matters so much: because rest is about remembering the origins of our faith story. Rest is about resisting the people and the powers that have oppressed us. Harmed us. Gotten in the way of our thriving. Rest is about recentering ourselves in the gift of liberation—delighting in the gift of liberation—that comes directly and solely from God.

Our Deuteronomy passage very explicitly names the long period of enslavement in Israel’s history as it calls God’s people to remember rest. It is telling God’s people to act in a way that flies in the face of the oppression they and their ancestors used to know as normal. It’s almost like, through the 10 Commandments, God is asking God’s people to live into their fullest selves—their most free and most loved selves.

Our passage from the Gospel of Matthew shows Jesus asking God’s people to go one step further and to remember that fullness and love come straight from the divine. God is the giver of fullness. God is the giver of freedom. God is the giver of love. God is the active agent in times of rest, removing heavy burdens and offering relief in their place.

When we remember rest, we give ourselves a chance to deny and defy the things that try to separate us from God—to resist them. When we remember rest, we testify. When we remember rest, we witness.

*08-21*

“On the sixth day they gathered twice as much food, two omers apiece. When all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, he said to them, ‘This is what the Lord has commanded: Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy sabbath to the Lord; bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil, and all that is left over put aside to be kept until morning.’”

— Exodus 16:22-23

You gotta eat. It’s absolutely basic to self care. So when God commands the people to do no work on the sabbath, they need to prepare in advance. Honestly, this is how I eat. I cook things in bulk and then when mealtime comes, I assemble my various proteins, starches, vegetables, and fats onto a plate, toss it in the microwave and voilà: dinner. It means that for a day or two I spend a lot of time in the kitchen prepping an cooking, but then I get the freedom of not having to spend huge amounts of time cooking at every meal.

Likewise, on the day before the sabbath, God’s people spent extra time gathering extra manna so that they would have what they needed for their day of rest. Rest was so important a commandment from God that this was the only day God allowed them to gather more than they needed for the current day (otherwise it would rot). Once again it was a call to trust that God would provide all that was needed even as the people could not provide for themselves. God calls us into that same trust today—that we can allow ourselves restorative sabbath rest and know that God will sustain us in all our needs.

When have I struggled with allowing myself to rest?

*08-22*

“Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a holy sabbath of solemn rest to the Lord; whoever does any work on it shall be put to death.”

— Exodus 35:2

Whoa. That’s drastic. I hope it was never carried out literally. But it is a testament to just how important it is to God that we care for ourselves through the blessed practice of sabbath rest. This is something we, as a society, are terrible at. We are constantly pulled in a million directions by our jobs, families, and activities and we put incredible pressure on ourselves to perform in every arena of our lives. The result is a kind of collective exhaustion which I believe comes out sideways in the terrible ways people so often treat one another—the toxic political climate, the constant gun violence, the innumerable microaggressions toward our BIPOC siblings, and so much more. Our failure to care for ourselves in vital and restorative ways is detrimental to us and all of creation. I wonder if the threat of death would actually make us want to stop and rest. Somehow I doubt it; we’re already killing ourselves with our constant need for activity. This is something we will always have to strive for—to work against the strident messages to go, go, go! and set aside sacred time for doing nothing at all.

What pushes or inspires me to take time to rest and care for myself?

*08-23*

“When the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan flowing from above shall be cut off; they shall stand in a single heap.”

— Joshua 3:13

Even the priests need to rest. For me, sabbath involves Sunday worship, which is hardly a time of rest for my pastor, music director, and all those whose work it is to lead that worship. I get to be in community with my congregation, sing and pray and commune and be filled. For me it is blessed rest. But not so for those writing sermons and preaching them, directing choirs, providing special music, and more. For those lovely and amazing human beings, sabbath rest will have to be taken a different day than what is nominally set aside for that purpose. I am fairly certain that most congregations allow for that day of rest—often a Monday or a Friday—each week for their leaders to recharge and fill their own wells. Our pastors and leaders are as human as we, and as in need of that rest as much if not more so than anyone else. God welcomes everyone into sabbath rest whenever and however they take it.

How do I support the well-being of my church leaders?

*08-24*

“And you will have confidence, because there is hope; you will be protected and take your rest in safety. You will lie down, and no one will make you afraid; many will entreat your favor.”

— Job 11:18-19

Rest from fear. Is such a thing possible? Can we simply set aside fear when we need a break from it? Much of the time, thankfully, I am able to live in a state of trust even with the many challenges I deal with in my daily life. But there are times when I’m blindsided by fear—completely leveled. In those moments, I feel utterly helpless to set it aside.

Luckily, when I absolutely cannot handle the fear, I have people to help me work through it and return to a state of trust. These are those friends who know my whole story, who know all my struggles, and who have my back no matter what. God speaks and acts through them, reminding me who I am and whose I am, what I have no control over and what I do, and how to turn everything over once again to the only one who can remove my fear. I cannot simply set aside and “rest from fear” on my own. I am just grateful for the ways God shows up to help me find that rest.

Who are my go-to people when fear threatens to overwhelm me?

*08-25*

“When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves.”

— Mark 6:29, 32

Again, as with fear yesterday, can we truly rest from grief? Grief is nonlinear. It overwhelms us when we least expect it, even years after the loss that created it. Three of my closest friends are walking the heart-wrenching path of watching a parent die slowly of dementia. Even before their beloved mom or dad dies, they are grieving every day, every week, another loss. Someone who has loved them their whole lives suddenly does not know who they are. Someone who has been their rock and their support suddenly needs them to be a support instead. I have friends who have lost children. I have friends who have lost vital relationships. There is so much cause for grief in our lives, and when it hits us, we are often powerless to resist it.

How can we rest from grief? I’m no expert, but in watching those I love walk through it, I have learned powerful lessons. Acknowledging the grief is key—naming it, owning it, letting it be what it is. Reaching out for support from friends, counselors, pastors, and others helps to release some of the immediate pain. And then, in those moments when the grief is quiet, we can lean into God’s blessed rest, even if just for a short time. God wants us to rest, and will help us do so.

Where have I experienced grief in my life? How do I get relief from it?

*08-26*

“There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image and for anyone who receives the mark of its name.”

— Revelation 14:11b

Are there really people who don’t deserve God’s blessed rest? I would say not. I mean, really, we’re all a little wicked when it comes down to it, even if we aren’t worshipping “the beast and its image.” Then again, one could make the case that we all do just that when we get caught up in our need to acquire wealth, prestige, power, and all the other trappings of our modern context. In that case, I think we all deprive ourselves from rest—God doesn’t take it away from us. God doesn’t need to.

We are called to push back against such worship in our own lives, to recognize where we are putting material things or people or relationships in the place of God, where we are trying to be our own god in our own lives so that we don’t need God anymore. Until we do this and relinquish our grip on life, we will never really find the rest God desires for us.

When do I find myself depriving myself of rest by seeking after worldly things?

*08-27*

“And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done.”

— Genesis 2:2

Main Idea: In a life of faith, rest is a dynamic practice—regular, intentional, and full of love.

Too often, we equate rest to inactivity. To nothingness. To the absence or lack of something dynamic. Too often, we view rest as an exciting and even elusive chance to disconnect from our day-to-day obligations and unplug, freezing a bit until we are forced to get moving again. Our texts this morning combine to tell us that rest is actually a very dynamic thing, in and of itself. Rest isn’t about hitting the pause button on busy-ness and going dark just to return to busy-ness again. Rather, it’s about disrupting our busy-ness with something more substantive. Reorienting our busy-ness toward something more meaningful. Using energy to change our energy.

We know all of this because we have a creator who models rest, and a savior who calls us to make rest a part of our everyday lives. Between Genesis and John, we learn that Christian rest has three, main components:

1) It is regular (habitual)

Our creation narrative presents rest in the context rhythm. Routine, even. After a certain amount of time—after a certain threshold had been reached—God makes time and a threshold for rest. (This is an invitation for us to reflect on our rhythms of rest.)

2) It is intentional

Jesus reminds us that abiding in love inherently involves keeping commandments. We might say, then, that rest is a practice. Rest involves some doing. Rest involves some seeking. Rest involves some evaluation on our parts, and even a little bit of performance. (What a beautiful way to reframe what we often think of as obligation.)

3) It is full of love

Joy being complete. Relationships moving from master-servant dynamics to friend-friend dynamics. Everything our scriptures tell us about rest ties back to one of these processes. God’s rest on the seventh day of creation was an act of delight, wonderment and enjoyment. And Jesus’s vision of rest for us is one of connection. Friendship. Adoration. A call to rest in the Christian life is synonymous to the Golden Rule: a call to love others as you love yourself.

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