

Learning to Rest by God's Grace

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Good morning. My name is Pastor Justin, and for those who may be relatively new, I am the Youth Pastor here at SVBC, and I have the honor of bringing the message this morning. I've been away on sabbatical and have been back for a month and a half now, and as I was praying and considering different passages, I thought that I would share some things that God laid on my heart during my sabbatical. Since being back I have a renewed vision and passion and love for the church, and I am so excited to see what God will do with SVBC. During my time He convicted me of a few things, revealed a few things, and has challenged me, and I want to share some of the things I learned with you today.

So please forgive that the format of the message today is not just hunkering down in a single passage ripping into it, but rather 3 different lessons from different places in scripture. **God taught me a new way to look at rest, how we should love newcomers, and gave me a refreshed look at our mission as the church.** But these things are something that although I was personally convicted about them, I really feel that for the church to really be the beautiful bride of Christ that is known for how it loves, like Paul says in Ephesians, that we must ask God to reveal in us our shortcomings in these areas so that we can change and grow.

So while I was on sabbatical, my main objective was to learn how to rest. I had realized that even when I had some moments of down time, I didn't feel rested after. And it was really God's sustaining grace that kept me going many days. So on sabbatical, I took regular walks and read more. Andrea and I spent mornings together talking and sharing with each other. I also had a big to do list that I wanted to get done around the house. But, what I learned was surprising: The things that brought me the most rest was my productivity around the house. As I got to the many projects (from cleaning out closets, catching up on some taxes, or home repairs), that I typically don't have the energy or time for, I was more and more relieved. I had no idea that the growing feeling of guilt for sitting down and not getting to these projects, weighed so heavy on me. So getting some of those things out of the way, helped my other activities be more restful.

Then in my readings, God pointed out two valuable things about rest. The first was from when I was reading a book called the Unhurried Life. It was the example we have been given in scripture of when to rest. In Genesis 2, it says

[²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man^{\[h\]} in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."](#)

²⁷ So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.
.... (jump to 31)...

³¹ And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. 2 And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. 3 So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation."

What God prompted was the idea that we shouldn't work for the rest, but we should work out of our rest. It's almost only semantics, but it was a profound attitude shift for me to think about the reality that we were created to rest before we work, and not just "work for the weekend". I grew up thinking that we need to finish out work before we play and rest. And while that has definite merit in certain circumstances, God created our pattern of Sabbath to rest in him and then work out of that rest. When I first read this, I thought, but didn't God set the example for us in that He worked six days then then rested on the seventh. However, when God created the world, he created people on day 6, literally the first day after they were created was a day of rest. **Even the Jewish** calendar days started at sunset – sunset to sunset was a day. Their first order of business every day was to go to bed and sleep. Then they would work the next day from that rest. Like I said, it's kind of just semantics, but for me this subtle shift in attitude helped me approach my sabbatical with an attitude of preparation for what God has ahead for me. **And** I think if we should stop seeing our weeks as just something to try to slog through to make it to the weekend, and instead think if it as God renews us as we rest in Him on the Sabbath we then work out of that rest and do the things that God has called us to do that week. **That attitude shift can help us focus more on resting with the Lord on the Sabbath, because we need his power and strength, and it may help you see the work week as part of your mission, rather than an obstacle to your rest.** We weren't made just to rest.

The second thing I read was written by evangelist and Professor Henry Drummond who was talking about rest. He gave this image "Two painters each painted a picture to illustrate his conception of rest. The first chose for his scene a still, lone lake among the far-off mountains. The second painter threw on his canvas a thundering waterfall with a fragile birch tree bending over the foam. At the fork of the branch, wet with spray, a robin sat on its nest. The first painting was only stagnation. The second was rest. For in rest, there are always two elements - - tranquility and energy; silence and turbulence; creation and destruction; fearlessness and fearfulness. Thus it was with Christ." This helped me see that to truly rest in Christ's presence is

not about finding only solitude away from the world, but resting in Christ with a heart full of His peace. Jesus said, "**Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid**" (John 14:27). Jesus would often find times away from the crowds to be with God the Father, but he never stayed there. Stagnation is not rest, nor is it the goal. We may want to lay on a beach and do nothing with the rest of our lives – completely escaping the chaos, but rest should be able to be done amidst the busyness of life. And our rest should enable us to be productive, to work for God's kingdom, in our jobs, in our homes, and ministries. It's good for us to love rest, to appreciate it and not take it for granted. When you are on vacation, and you wish you had another week or year, but we were not created to stay in stagnation. God has lots for us to accomplish, so we rest, and we rest in Christ. Just lying on a beach or sitting in front of the TV or on your phone watching a show is not the rest that the Bible talks about like in Hebrews 4 that says: "**So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, 10 for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. 11 Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.**" We need to be spending some time with God in our restful times, letting God care for us and rejuvenate us. And when our time of rest is over, we get back to the work that God has for us to do – including loving others and being on mission.

That brings me to the second lesson. While on sabbatical, our family attended different churches. It was very interesting to be a new person going to church again. The last time I went to a new church, I was a single guy. The main thing I cared about was that the church preached God's word faithfully. Now I have a family and we have a ton of specific needs that we have to look for in addition. As I'm sure won't be a surprise to many of you, I was surprised to realize that our biggest questions were about our kids. As we left home, parked, and made our way inside, we were talking to the kids about what it might be like, and helping them prepare for the change. I told Allison that she should be my spy and find out what the best parts of the kids ministry were so she could report back to me and we could steal those ideas and use them here.

It was interesting walking into a new place, not knowing anyone, and not being known. No one knows my history, who I am, if I love Jesus, or anything about my family. This resonated with me as I pondered after how interesting each interaction was. When our family comes in, we assume that we are a little bit noticeable, (the wheelchair, extra bags, suction machine). So it was really interesting to see the different ways people engaged with us. I identified four different types of people. The first is the greeter. Every church we went to had greeters at the

door. These people were awesome, and I think often an underappreciated ministry in churches. So shout out to the greeters. You see we strive to show love to our neighbours, we understand that it can be an intimidating thing coming into a church for the first time, and Hebrews 13:2 says “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers...” We want people to know they are welcome and that this is a friendly place. Some greeters just shook our hands, and said good morning, and others, recognizing we were new, gave us directions on where to register our kids, and at one church that didn’t have a wheelchair ramp, but had a lift. We couldn’t get the lift to work, and so a gentleman at the door came out and tried to help get it working, and when that did not work, he walked us around the building to another entrance and walked with us to the sanctuary. It was just really nice and made me really appreciate those of you who serve as greeters and ushers. But even beyond the greeting teams, many people in the church would smile at us, shake our hands and just say hello. They weren’t on the greeting team, but they were greeters, and it made each experience that much nicer.

The next type of person we encountered was the hugger. The first church we went to there was this sweet elderly woman behind us. When she saw us she lit up and when we went to shake her hand she said “Put that away” and gave us big grandma hugs. She asked us all sorts of questions and wanted to know us more. She embraced us both figuratively and literally. We loved it. She showed us an expression of love that made us feel so welcome, and like we were family. When we read scripture and we read about Paul visiting these churches, and we see how they embraced him, welcoming him, and caring for him as if he is family. And we see Paul in humility not want to be a burden, but he encourages them in his letters to take care of different people who will be visiting, and we can only imagine that when a brother or sister from another city made the journey, how they would be welcomed and care for, and embraced. And even in the most literal sense, having that lady hug us, was a real tangible expression of the love we are told to have for one another. So if you are hugger and it’s appropriate, you should embrace that in yourself, and hug away. (Sorry for that pun – I just had to!) But of course only if it’s appropriate. Some people don’t like to be hugged, and if I went around hugging strangers like that lady did to us, that would probably be super creepy, so though I can’t get away with that, maybe it’s appropriate for you. Paul does say in 1 Thessalonians 5 to greet all brothers with a holy kiss, but I think in our context a handshake or a hug should suffice. But even if you don’t give newcomers a literal embrace, we need to embrace them figuratively, getting to know them, and helping them know that they belong here.

The third type of person we encountered was the inviter. At one church we went to, a woman talking with us and getting to know us, invited our family over for lunch. She said “I just have

soup, but if you don't have other plans we would love to have you all over." It was so nice. She wasn't intimidated by our chaos, but extended an invitation to us, and I was reminded how powerful an invitation can be. Not just simply because of how special it makes that person feel, but also what God can do through an invitation. When Jesus was talking to the woman at the well in John 4 it says **"Then, leaving her water Jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people 'come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?' They came out of the town and made their way toward him."** The woman went and invited everyone she could in the town. In acts the church grew every day. Thousands were being baptized. That sort of thing doesn't happen unless people invite others.

Through all our encounters, God challenged me to be better than I have been. He convicted me to do better at getting to know people and invite them. And with all of us, if we all were better at getting to know people, and we didn't let our fear and insecurities stand in the way, and if we invited people to lunch, or for a coffee, or maybe for lunch the following week. Or at the very least and just as important, inviting them to come back to church the next week – that would be a great way to express love to those who God bring through the doors into our family, the body of Christ.

The third lesson that God laid on my heart was about the gospel. I spent some time reflecting on different aspects of the gospel – the message, the person of Jesus, sin, repentance, the victory, and the desperate need we all have. Through that God stirred in me to look at the church and be honest with what I saw. As I thought about the North American church, the way that we do church, my heart broke a little. As I considered the deep love we are commanded to have for one another, and that we see in the scriptures, the juxtaposition was alarming. In John 13 Jesus says **"34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."** And while there is certainly love flowing through our church it is not to the same extent as what we see in scripture.

Often what we read in scripture, Christians loving one another and God adding to their number daily, we don't see that in reality. Now don't hear me wrong, I absolutely see the miraculous hand of God at work throughout the church in a diversity of ways. Here among us, I regularly see some people loving selflessly, giving of their time and talents and treasures to help be the hands and feet of God, but only some. If I can be completely honest I also see people who come and go who desperately need the love of the community of God, and leave feeling just as lonely and in need as when they came. A few years back, Pastor Tom, Pastor Serge and I put together

that discipleship diagram that you see throughout the church, and in it there's a line, a gap where we connect with Christ, and we get baptized, and then we just fill a pew never or rarely contributing to the body of Christ. And that breaks my heart. Because we were made for so much more than just joining a club.

And when young people look and see the church, and they don't see their parents or those older than them, living in a way that reflects the Gospel of Christ, they notice! And they leave. Because what they see in the church does not reflect what they read in the book. Instead they see apathy, and selectiveness. They see hypocrisy, and traditions that nullify the word of God. They see a people who do not live like they are on mission to share the gospel with urgency, but people who only share if they are asked or pressed on an issue. And they just leave. And the ones who don't walk away from faith leave the local church looking for some way that they can contribute to God's kingdom work in a meaningful way.

But we must remember that the God we serve is very real! Jesus was the very real God-man who lived in history, walked the earth and experienced very real trials and struggles, yet did not sin. Historians of Jesus' day wrote about him, that he was a doer of wonderful works, and that he died on a cross, and they even make the claim that he rose from the dead just like the scriptures say. Yet the scriptures unlock the reason why he did those things – it was because of LOVE. [God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life, For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world but to save it!](#)

The Gospel is an announcement not just about who God is, or what he might do, but about what God HAS done in history. It is not about how we might somehow reach God, but how HE already reached down to us! We cannot achieve salvation, we can only accept it. And we have to live as if we mean it. Because (and I am just as guilty) we get comfortable. And when God asks more of us, to serve in ministry or to give of our precious time, or use our gifts, we cringe, and when we see others striving and learning to use their gifts, we have lots of criticism for how they should be doing it. But we MUST use our gifts and love others because we have first been loved by Christ.

As a youth pastor I have the privilege of working with teenagers. The reason that we have a youth ministry is not to make kids into Christians. Only God can do that. But instead we strive to be a tool for parents; to help them be another voice in helping students hear the Gospel. We create safe spaces for them to learn about and encounter God and his church. As a result, we have a unique dynamic. The group grows as the church grows. Every six years, we have a brand

new set of students who each bring a new perspective. We teach God's word to grade 7 students who don't care one lick about being there, and Grade 12 students who are in love with Jesus and want to grow deeper, to grade 12 students who would rather be anywhere else, and grade 7 students who are seeking the truth. Each year kids leave and each year kids come. And we get the honor of watching them grow in faith and understanding. Then get married and have kids. I was just talking over coffee with one of our youth sponsors who was telling me that she was able to go to a wedding this summer and pray with the bride before she left, because when that girl was in youth, she used to pray with her, and as she told me about this precious moment, I could see the love in her eyes and how proud she was for her. Because that girl came to know Jesus as a teenager, and she had an encounter with Christ that rocked her world and absolutely transformed her. And she didn't come from a home of Christ followers, but had people in the church, in her life, who loved her and poured into her, who challenged her, and lived in a way what reflected the living God. And this girls was able to see, know, and experience the love of Christ. And now she lives it out, in and through her own life with her God fearing husband. Because someone chose to be used by God.

Don't you want to be used by God? The gospel transforms us. But many live as though it was just a decision they made a long time ago. God reminded me how very real and how very powerful God's message of hope and salvation is. Because we can all get comfortable, and forget how incredible it really is. By pondering the Gospel, I was reminded of how amazing it is. How powerful it is. I am excited about this upcoming season of ministry, sharing the gospel with students, loving them, and helping them to know their creator. Because I know that it will change lives as students accept salvation and encounter the living God. And I pray that you would be reminded as well. What will God do through you? How will you step up to be used? What ministry will you serve in? What neighbors will you love? Who will you bring the Good News to? When new comers come to our church, how will you love them? And when will you take time to spend time with your creator? When will you rest with him? The Lord has blessed us, and commanded that we rest in Him on the Sabbath. Because without Him and His power we cannot do anything. And through him we can do all things because he gives us strength.