The Power of Rest

Technology is an amazing thing. And just like everything, it can be used for good, and it can be used for harm. In fact, I believe that most inventions when they come about are meant to advance our society. Think about electricity. With it came the ability to extend the day and spend more time with friends and family. Able to travel further and safer. And electricity can be harmful. We can see in the dark because of electricity, this also means we can work longer, businesses can focus on making more and more money causing workers to work, more and more.

Think about the internet. What can be used to help people access more information in a fraction of the time which is great, because I no longer have to walk to the library to borrow books and turn the pages, and use a google search. But the internet also makes it is easier for people to access things like the dark web and make it easier for predators and manipulators to prey on people.

Email is a great invention. I could mail a letter if you will, in seconds instead of having to wait several days for the USPS person to deliver it. But that also means that my work hours extend to when I am home because not every business has good boundaries. I now am expected to answer that email in a timely manner that may come over dinner, taking me away from my family or hobbies.

Honestly, it seems that technological advancements were supposed to help us and give us more time to be free and accomplish what we need, And, in actuality, as life has unfolded, technology has just made us busier and busier. Instead of the microwave or George foreman grill freeing me up to focus on myself and to rest, it just frees me up to add another thing in my schedule.

Its almost as if a full and packed schedule and your ability to maneuver in it is a form of currency, it’s a badge of honor. Something to be celebrated. And what ends up happening is that people are getting burned out more and more. Because people are working more and more hours and kids are in more and more extra curriculars in order to compete in the ever more competitive process of getting into college. There seems to be no time for rest, say for a pandemic, and rest is less and less a priority in our society, because time is money, and everyone is after the almighty dollar.

And all of this is counter to the Kingdom of heaven. What God would have for us is not to get busier and busier, God would have us be productive, and also rest so that we do not burn out. Especially because if we are busy and focused on the grind of this world, then we will not be able to focus on God. Almost everything in this world has the power if we let it, to distract us from God. And rest is so important its all over the scriptures.

Look at the very first book of the Bible and the very second chapter. God is creating the universe, and after God is done creating the universe and all that we are able to see and not see, God does something spectacular. God does not go off and celebrate God’s achievement, God does not go out and stay busy, God, took a rest. In the Torah it is written, “On the seventh day God finished the work… and ceased from all the work … and God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because on it God ceased from all the work of creation…” (Genesis 2:2-3)

Jewish Scholar George Robinson writes this about the sabbath. “Most people reading that passage find it a bit of a shock. “On the seventh day God finished the work. . . ” But what did God create on the seventh day? Didn’t God “cease. . . from all the work of creation” on the seventh day? What God created on the seventh day, the ancient rabbis tell us, was rest.

The Hebrew word used here is *menuchah*, and “rest” is an inadequate translation. To say that Shabbat menuchah means a “Sabbath of rest” only tells half the story. In the Jewish (afternoon) service we are told that sabbath is, “a rest of love freely given, a rest of truth and sincerity, a rest in peace and tranquility, in quietude and safety.” And because of Genesis, this rest is yoked in the same breath to “holiness.” The concept of rest is linked forever with God and exists so that we might glorify God’s name.”

We are not beasts of burden. We should not live to work. We should not be chained to routine. Chained to business, Sabbath unchains us.

Sabbath is meant to be a day of peace. It offers us a chance for peace with nature, with society, and with ourselves. The prohibitions on work are designed to make us stop–if only for one day of the week–our relentless efforts to tame, to conquer, to subdue the earth and everything on it.”

Rest has been incorporated into the creation of the universe and if we ignore it we do it at our own peril. Let me demonstrate this with a story.

According to a Greek legend, in ancient Athens a man noticed the great storyteller Aesop playing childish games with some little boys. He laughed and jeered at Aesop, asking him why he wasted his time in such frivolous activity.

Aesop responded by picking up a bow, loosening its string, and placing it on the ground. Then he said to the critical Athenian, "Now, answer the riddle, if you can. Tell us what the unstrung bows implies."

The man looked at it for several moments but had no idea what point Aesop was trying to make. Aesop explained, "If you keep a bow always bent, it will break eventually; but if you let it go slack, it will be more fit for use when you want it."

People are also like the bow. That's why we all need to take time to rest. In today's Scripture, Jesus prescribed time off for His wearied disciples after they had returned from a prolonged period of ministry. And in the Old Testament, God set a pattern for us when He "rested from all His work" (Gen.2:3).

Shouldn't we take His example seriously? Start by setting aside a special time to relax physically and renew yourself emotionally and spiritually. You will be at your best for the Lord if you have taken time to loosen the bow.

If we stay on the grind day in and day out, if we take for granted the privilege we have in the ability to take a rest, I believe we do ourselves a disservice. And you actually are harming yourself and hindering your ability to be who God has called you to be. You prevent yourself from being your best self. And places that don’t afford rest, go against God and God’s expectations for humanity and the world.

There are tangible effects to not getting rest. We can become more moody and more easily irritated, we can lose sleep at night which has several consequences in and of itself, you can get injured, your endocrine system gets overworked and fatigued and gets out of sorts, and eventually your performance suffers. Your ability to be on your “A” game diminishes, and eventually all of this turns into bad health and bad health turns into early death.

We all need rest and if we are going to follow in Jesus, footsteps we must listen to him and rest. If you truly want to follow God and be in God’s will, you must take a rest. Rest is part of Gods holy and divine plan. And David Acknowledged it when he said the Lord makes him lie down in green pastures and leads him by still waters.

Right there lie down in green pastures. The Lord gives the sheep the ability to not have to keep moving from one place to the next in the desert and have to find their own still water. No the Lord brings them to a place of serenity for the sheep, a place where they can finally relax, a place where if they want, they could rest. God wants us to rest. God doesn’t want us to rest all day, every day and be lazy, God wants us to do what we are called to do and then rest and recharge our batteries because it is what’s good for us, it is what’s healthy for us. It prevents not just burn out, it also prevents harm. And not just physically, but emotionally and spiritually as well.

Saving us from harm is one benefit of rest. Another benefit of rest is that it actually makes us more productive. Yes for our work, etc, but mainly for our work for the kingdom of God. Listen to this story.

One man challenged another to an all-day wood chopping contest. The challenger worked very hard, stopping only for a brief lunch break. The other man had a leisurely lunch and took several breaks during the day. At the end of the day, the challenger was surprised and annoyed to find that the other fellow had chopped substantially more wood than he had.

"I don't get it," he said. "Every time I checked, you were taking a rest, yet you chopped more wood than I did."

"But you didn't notice," said the winning woodsman, "that I was sharpening my ax when I sat down to rest."

The responsibilities, busyness, stresses, and strains of simply living, can cause each of us to neglect what is important and have a lasting effect on our lives.

In our Gospel reading, the disciples come back from their commissioning and traveling throughout the land, and Jesus knew that they were tired and weary.

The Lord Jesus knew how the pressures of ministry affect the human body. He knew what it was to be tired and thirsty, weary and worn out. He was well aware that times of mental and spiritual refreshment are necessary for all God's people. And so, he invites them to rest and practice what he did all the times when he went to a solitary place to pray.

Recognizing their fatigue and need of restoration, the Lord, in His gentle chiding, but gracious compassion, told them, "'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest for a while,' because so many people were coming and going that they didn't have time enough to eat." Throughout Scripture God often uses the simple, natural things to teach us important spiritual truths, and these gentle instructions of the Lord to His faithful little band 'to rest awhile', were no exception. Just as the body needs time to recover and recuperate, so also the spirit and soul need times of rest and refreshment.

Listen to Jesus, and remember the importance of rest.