

Above All Else: Learning To Guard Your Heart... By Choosing To Rest

September 3, 2017

In 1894 a new federal holiday was enacted. The day we celebrate tomorrow ... Labor Day.

Labor Day a creation of the labor movement is dedicated to the social and economic achievements of American workers. It's kind of a collective, "Thank you/Catch your breath" kind of day.

It was the Labor movement that instigated the eight-hour day movement, which advocated eight hours for work, eight hours for recreation, and eight hours for rest. There was some real wisdom in that movement.

You see we live in a culture that really doesn't place a lot of value in rest. How do I know this?

How many times have been asked, "*You staying busy?*" or "*You working hard?*" This is because we live in a culture that places a high value in busyness.

How many times when asked the question, "*How are you doing?*" you answer with "*I'm tired!*" Sometimes we even wear that answer as a badge to say, look at all I am doing and am involved, yet often times it comes at a high cost.

I'm not here to say that busyness or hard work is a bad thing, in fact quite the contrary. It is healthy ... to a point. It's important, but if we are not careful as I just said, it comes at a high cost.

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As we learn to guard our heart, we need to learn what God says about rest, because we as a culture, are tired, and quite frankly don't place a lot of value on rest, but Jesus does.

Why is this? Because He knows what most all of us already know and that is tiredness and stress effect us in very negative ways.

After a long week of overtime at work, responsibilities at home, bills to pay, kids to shuttle around, ministry responsibilities it doesn't take long for irritability, anxiety, depression, headaches, insomnia, and worse, to set in. It's not good place to be.

Lack of rest not only affects us physically, but it also affects our relationship with Jesus. If we are too busy to slow down long enough to hear what He wants to say to us, then how will we ever enjoy the relationship He wants to have with us? How will we ever know what His will is for our lives?

How will we truly know how to guard our hearts?

It is for this reason we need to learn to slow down, catch our breath, and rest. Let's talk about it.

This morning I want to look at 5 truths about rest.

If we can gain an understanding and appreciation of these five truths, then I believe our hearts will be more aligned with God's heart.

We often think, I'll rest when things slow down, or I'll take a break or a vacation, if I can find the time. God sees it very differently; in fact rest is a command.

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1. Rest is a command

Why? Because He knows we need it! We may think we don't need rest, but the One who created us knows better.

How many of you can relate to a day like this:

You get up in the morning, and you take a quick shower. Brew and drink a cup of coffee, grab something to eat as you head out the door to drop the kids off at school. On your way to work you realize you forgot something so you drive home to get it.

You finally get to work. After you respond to 75 emails and 5 voicemails, you attempt to get some work done, only to be interrupted by a coworker that really needs to talk. You spend time talking with your coworker and then get back to work. You spend the next 3 hours working and realize it's lunch time and decide you have no time, so work through lunch.

After lunch you respond to 30 more emails and take 10 phone calls. You finally leave work at 6:00 and slug it out through terrible traffic to get home.

You get home and eat a quick dinner and then head back out the door to take your kids to soccer practice. After soccer practice you help your kids with homework, try to connect with your spouse, and finally fall into bed, exhausted, only to repeat the same thing the next day.

Makes you tired just thinking about it!

Look at what God says,

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Exodus 20:8-12

Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹ You have six days each week for your ordinary work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the Lord your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you. ¹¹ For in six days the Lord made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them; but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy. Exodus 20:8-12 (NLT)

Now we have to be careful here. For some would say that the Sabbath is Sunday. Some would say it is Saturday, and on *that* day, we are to cease from all work, and must attend church, do spiritual things, etc.

Why do we have to be careful? Because, if we are not, we will become like the Pharisees (Religious leaders) who accused Jesus and His disciples of working on the Sabbath.

In the New Testament we read about Jesus and His disciples breaking off heads of grain to eat, on the Sabbath. The Pharisees saw them and accused Jesus and His disciples of disobeying their Sabbath laws.

Jesus knowing their legalistic tendencies replied with,

Then Jesus said to them, “The Sabbath was made to meet the needs of people, and not people to meet the requirements of the Sabbath.” Mark 2:27 (NLT)

Jesus right here, sums up the spirit of the law. It’s not a matter of being a slave to one day, it’s a matter of making sure you *have* a day of rest.

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Why is it important to Him? I believe it's because He first and foremost loves us.

2. Rest is a demonstration of God's love for us.

Psalm 127:2

It is useless for you to work so hard from early morning until late at night, anxiously working for food to eat; for God gives rest to his loved ones.

Psalm 127:2 (NLT)

He knows we need it.

We must remember, we are on a mission. Our mission: "Following Jesus fully. Transforming the city completely."

This doesn't happen on it's own. It takes work. It takes unwavering commitment, and in order for us to be effective in this mission, we must stop long enough to rest.

Because God loves us He wants us to rest, for in rest we become better people.

It is in rest, that I feel the nearness of God in ways I would never experience other wise. It is in these times that I am equipped to make a great Kingdom difference in this world.

Illus.:

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

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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."*

You see when we take time to rest, we get better. When we are better, we are more effective for the Kingdom.

As a pastor I work hard. I do a lot of “good” things. But the measure of what I do is directly linked to the rest I get. I make it a priority. You should too.

It's important to remember rest isn't just physical.

3. Rest is both physical and spiritual

To be effective for the kingdom it requires that we are both in shape physically and spiritually.

We will never be effective for the Kingdom if we don't find rest.

I'm thankful for a guy by the name of Frederick W. Taylor. It was after a scientific study on the workplace and productivity, that he introduced the coffee break!

It goes without saying, I of course I love drinking coffee, but more than that he demonstrated that people will produce more if they have periodic breaks. Sounds like God's idea to me!

Farmers understand this principle. They know that soil needs rest, so they

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rotate their crops and systematically leave a portion of their land fallow, or unsown. They do this because land that has rested produces a greater harvest.

Jesus and His disciples were busy. His disciples were busy following Jesus and meeting the needs of people. They needed to get rest so that they could continue on.

Mark 6:30-32

³⁰ The apostles returned to Jesus from their ministry tour and told him all they had done and taught. ³¹ Then Jesus said, "Let's go off by ourselves to a quiet place and rest awhile." He said this because there were so many people coming and going that Jesus and his apostles didn't even have time to eat. ³² So they left by boat for a quiet place, where they could be alone.

Mark 6:30-32 (NLT)

It was there that they found physical rest and nourishment. It was also there that they spent time with Jesus.

Jesus knew that if they did not pull away and find rest, they would collapse, that they would be of no good, if they did not take the time to catch their breath, eat, and rest. But it was more than physical.

Imagine what it would have been like to simply sit at the feet of Jesus, find rest, and allow Him to speak into your life.

Here's the good news. We can do that!

We too can sit at the feet of Jesus and find spiritual rest for our souls.

If you were to ask anyone in my family, where I am each morning from 7:30 to 8:00 they would all tell you I am sitting in my favorite chair in the

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family room, sitting quietly, reading God's Word and allowing Him to speak to me and prepare me for the day.

I don't say this to brag, or to impress anyone. I say this to say ... I need it. I have to have that. My days are way too busy to not carve out that space in my schedule.

I have made this a daily habit. This is a habit (or discipline) that I invite you begin as well.

Keep in mind; habits don't come easy. They take work.

4. Rest takes work.

That sounds weird. If rest is the opposite of work, how is it that it requires work?

Research suggests that it takes 21 days to form a habit. Twenty-one days doing the same thing, before it becomes a regular part of your day.

I love the quote:

"Sow a thought, reap an act. Sow an act, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character. Sow a character, reap a destiny. "

Let this thought of rest move from merely and idea into action, and then a habit that changes your character and sets the course of your destiny.

Let's talk about the spiritual side of rest.

If we don't stop long enough to be still, how will we ever really get to know God?

I said rest takes work, and in order for work to happen we must be intentional.

We must be intentional about slowing down and being still.

Psalm 46:10

“Be still, and know that I am God!...” Psalm 46:10 (NLT)

Because it won't happen on it's own.

How good are you at being still?

I'm not real good at it. I have a hard time stilling both my body and my mind, but I know if I never do, then I will never experience the relationship with Jesus that He desires with me.

It's a lot like a marriage.

When Robin and I were first dating, I couldn't get enough time with her. She was at the forefront of all my thoughts, and I wanted to spend every spare minute I had with her. I wanted to know everything I could about her and wanted her to know everything about me.

Now, 19 years later, life is busier than ever. We have kids, jobs, bills, responsibilities, and it's real easy for those things that create the business of life to crowd out the times of just being still and being with each other.

I have been asked a number of times, *“Brian, what is your best advise for newlyweds?”* My answer is always the same. Date your spouse! Husbands, date your wife. Never stop. Make it a priority. Why? Because if we don't make it a priority, we lose touch with each other and it sends our relationship down the wrong path.

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Our relationship with Jesus is the same! Do not neglect it.

Much like you make plans to date your spouse, make time in your schedule to stop and rest. It won't happen on it's own.

- Choose a place

Find a place where you can be alone, distraction free. A place that is comfortable. A place that you identify as your place to meet with God.

- Choose a time

Choose a time in which you are at your best, before you are worn out from the day.

Give God the best of your day, not the left overs

- Choose a plan

Decide how you will spend your time. Read through a section of scripture. Find a good devotional book that will guide your thinking.

Sit in silence and allow God to speak to you.

Spend time speaking to Him, prayer.

Lastly, remember...

5. Rest is a non-negotiable activity.

Do not let anything steal it away from you.

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Don't make it optional. Jesus didn't...

Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to pray. Mark 1:35 (NLT)

If Jesus needed it, you can bet we do too!

God told the Israelites...

"You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but on the seventh day you must stop working." Exodus 23:12a (NLT)

"...you must stop."

I love the words of the 23rd Psalm.

When we make sure that rest is a priority, a non-negotiable activity, we will reap the reward.

Psalm 23:1-3

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

² *He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,*

³ *he refreshes my soul...."* Psalm 23:1-3 (NIV)

Do see the imagery there? "*He makes me lie down*", "*He leads me beside quiet waters*", these are all images of slowing down and being still.

And the result ... "*He refreshes my soul.*" The reward!

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Sometimes we still refuse to slow down. I am always a little bit haunted by the phrase, *“He makes me lie down.”*

There have been times in my life in which I have felt I have been made to lie down and rest. Perhaps you have as well.

Have you ever un-expectantly ended up sick or injured? Have you ever been laid up in the hospital, at a time in which you “didn’t have time” to be there?

I have had times in which God has literally slammed the breaks on my life to force me to slow down.

Had I not become sick, or had circumstances that forced my slow down, I would not have taken the time myself to slow down and find rest. He made me!

Don’t let this be the case for you. Make rest a regular part of your life.

It is much better to follow the words of Jesus...

Matthew 11:28-29

²⁸ Then Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Matthew 11:28-29 (NLT)

WORSHIP TEAM

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This is the last in our series, “Above All Else: Learning To Guard Your Heart”

Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.
Proverbs 4:23 (NLT)

A guarded heart is a rested heart. It is heart determined to do all that it can to know God and His plans for us. This will only happen when we slow down and rest.

If you have the day off tomorrow for Labor Day, let it begin tomorrow.

If you need to, schedule a time tomorrow in a place that is quite and comfortable and experience the rest God has for you. You will not regret it.

Prayer.