

GOD'S ANTIDOTE TO BUSYNESS

Psalm 23 Stressbusters - Part 2

January 18, 2009

A couple of years ago Nancy and I were in a Sunday School class where students were asked to think of an image for their life. Immediately, both Nancy and I said, "A calendar." A calendar was the symbol because so much of our life was focused and controlled by the calendar. "What's next? What's next? What's next?" And I don't think we are unique in that. Today we look at a prescription for those who are under the oppression of the calendar. What is the antidote to busyness.

Here's a quiz to find out if you're a workaholic:

1. Are you always in a hurry?
2. Is your "To do" list always unrealistically long?
3. Do you use days off to catch up with unfinished work?
4. Has more than one person ever told you to slow down?
5. Do you feel guilty when you relax?
6. Do you have to get sick to take time off?

You know you're a workaholic when...

- ... all your Christmas cards come from business associates.
- ... you head out for "Back to School" night and you don't know which ones your kids attend.
- ... you wear a beeper to church.
- ... your family refers to you as "occupant".
- ... you can unwind after work by watching whatever is on between 1 and 2 AM.
- ... you take business related reading material into the bathroom.

This is not the kind of life God wants us to live. Psalm 127:2 *"It is senseless for you to work so hard from early morning until late at night... God wants his loved ones to get their proper rest."* If you're burning the candle at both ends, you're not as bright as you think you are. Sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is go home and go to bed. Many people think, if I give my life to God, if I really sell out to Jesus, He's going to give me too much to do and I'll have more to do than I already have. Psalm 23:2 *"He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside the still waters."* If you were a sheep, you would understand this because for sheep, this is a perfect picture of paradise. He's referring to rest, refreshment, and recreation. God is interested in our rest and recreation. He wants us to live a whole, balanced and complete life. He wants us to not be working all the time. If you really give your life to Jesus, He's probably not going to add more on, as much as He's going to take some things off so you can finally slow down and rest.

A CNN poll found that 59% of Americans would like to slow down and relax more. A Harris poll said we have 8½ hours less leisure time per week than we did a decade ago. We're working more and enjoying it less. What we need is God's prescription to RELAX.

R - REALIZE MY WORTH

The reason most people overwork is because they confuse their work and their worth. We think that if we work a whole lot, achieve a lot, we're worth a lot. We confuse what we do with who we are. In America, we get our primary identity from what we do. When we meet someone, after we ask their name, the next question is "What do you do?" We think we get our worth from our work. The Bible doesn't teach that.

Many have grown up with a certain phrase echoing in their mind: "You're nobody." Maybe a teacher told you that. Or a former friend. Maybe a brother or sister. Maybe a parent said, "You're never going to amount to much." One reason we overwork is to say, "I'll show them. I'll prove my

worth by my accomplishments, my achievements.” Yet we never accomplish enough to feel satisfied. “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me.” Not true. Names do hurt. Names last far longer than broken bones. Many years later we’re still hearing that little voice saying, “You’ve got to keep paddling. You’ve got to keep working. Somebody may catch up. Someone going to get ahead of you. You’ve got to prove your value, your significance, your worth, by overworking.” And we never slow down.

The antidote is to realize what God says about us. James 1:18 *“God decided to give us life through the word of truth so we might be the most important of all the things He made.”* God says we matter more than the rest of creation. We can relax. We don’t have to prove our worth. If we were made by God, we’re worth it. I am me and I’m OK because God don’t make no junk. If you really understand and feel what you are worth to God, not just know it but really feel it, it will change your life. If God likes me, and I like me, if you don’t like me, that’s your problem. Don’t spend your whole life trying to win approval from other people. We don’t need the approval of other people to be happy. But we do need to realize how valuable we are to God. In Matthew 6 Jesus said, *“... your heavenly Father feeds the (sparrows). And you are far more valuable to him than they are.”*

If God notices when a bird falls, if God takes care of the birds, don’t you think He will take care of you? Think about that. That means that one, we will never understand how much God really loves us. Two, there is nothing we can ever do in life that will make God love us more than He does already. And three, there is nothing we can ever do that will make God love us any less. His love is not based on our performance. It’s unconditional love. It’s based on who He is, not who we are. We don’t have to prove our worth by overworking. God says you’re OK. God says *“I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.”* (Isaiah 49:16) When Jesus died on the cross, they put nails through His hands. He said, “I love you this much. I have engraved you on the palms of My hands.” He can never forget how much He loves us. When we get to Heaven, He’s going to show us those engraved hands.

E - ENJOY WHAT I ALREADY HAVE

Ecclesiastes 3:13 *“All of us should... enjoy what we have worked for. It is God’s gift.”* Can you be so preoccupied in getting more that you don’t enjoy what you’ve already got? Sure. We see that every Christmas. Can you be so busy trying to acquire more and more that you don’t enjoy what’s already in your garage? We have these beautiful homes but nobody enjoys them because we’re not at home. We’re all staying late at the office. We get “The desire to acquire” syndrome. “They’ve got that so we’ve got to get that. They’ve moved up so we’ve got to move up.” We’re trying to keep up with the Jones’s not realizing they just refinanced or filed for bankruptcy. We buy things we don’t need, with money we don’t have to impress people we don’t even like. We try to get more and more and we get overextended financially. Then both Mom and Dad have to work because we have to hustle to make ends meet. We spend all of our time making payments on these things we’ve bought and inevitably relationships begin to deteriorate. And it is all about making payments. Americans no longer ask, “How much does it cost?” Instead we ask, “How much are the payments?” And the payments keep us working and overworking.

That’s not the way God wants us to live. *“It’s better to have only a little, with peace of mind, than be busy all the time...”* (Ecclesiastes 4:6) The greatest things in life aren’t things. As a pastor I’ve been at a lot of death beds. I have never had one person say, “I wish I had spent more time at

the office.” Many have said “I wish I had spent more time with my kids (wife, husband, building relationships, with God)”. We get all of these things but we’re not going to take them with us. You don’t ever see a hearse pulling a U-haul. You’re not taking it with you. In America it’s considered a tragedy to “die penniless”. What a better time to go! You write your last check. You’re totally empty, and then you die! That’s not a tragedy. That’s timing! Enjoy what you have while you’ve got it and don’t be worried about getting more.

L - LIMIT MY LABOR

I must make a conscious decision to make time for other things besides work. I have to decide how many hours I realistically want to spend working each week and then I need to stick to it. I need to schedule time for myself, time with God alone, time with my family. Those are important elements in my life as well as work. Limiting your labor is especially important for two groups: 1) The self employed. If you’re self-employed, your tendency is to never stop working. You bring work home, never take time off. You’re not on a 9 to 5 job and you keep the work with you all of the time. Those of you who are entrepreneurs can fall prey to this if you don’t limit your labor.

2) Single parents. I don’t know how you do all you do. I don’t know how you work and manage a family at the same time. You of all people need to learn to set some boundaries for yourself. Our best requires rest. Do you ever consider that we can get so many irons in the fire, that we put the fire out. There is no fire, no passion for anything. Ecclesiastes 10:15 “*Only someone too stupid to find his way home would wear himself out with work!*” It’s not too smart to work all the time, and I should know because I’ve done it, and it’s always the temptation that lies before me. But if the bow is never unstrung it loses its power. A lady called a pastor one day. She said, “I called all day Friday and couldn’t get you.” The pastor said, “Friday’s my day off.” And the lady, a little indignant said, “The devil never takes a day off.” And the pastor replied, “Yes, and if I didn’t take a day off I’d be just like him.”

Exodus 20:9-10 “*You have six days in which to do your work, but the seventh day is to be a day of rest dedicated to Me.*” God says that one day off every week is the rule. This is the fourth commandment. It’s in God’s Top Ten. It’s up there with “Don’t commit adultery” and “Don’t murder”. That’s how serious God takes this. Every seventh day, take a day off. If you’re not taking a day off, it means you’re breaking the ten commandments. God says “Do it.” Back around 600 BC, the nation of Israel was taken into exile in Babylon. Do you know why that happened? God said that the people had been ignoring the Sabbath. They didn’t rest, and they didn’t give the land a chance to rest. So God took it into His own hands. Babylon came in and took them away, and for 70 years, the land rested.

Sabbath literally means the last day of the week, a day when God expects us to rest and be re-created. In Mark 2, Jesus said, “*The Sabbath was made to benefit man.*” Colossians says it doesn’t matter what day you choose as long as you choose one day every week. Sunday is not my Sabbath. For me, it’s a work day. What should you do on your day off, your Sabbath? You don’t use it to catch up on work you haven’t finished. What do you do on the Sabbath?

1) Rest my body. If you don’t take time to rest your body, your body will make time to rest itself. Maybe with a cold or the flu. Maybe by heading to the hospital. To be at our best, we need to get our rest. During the French Revolution they outlawed Sunday as a day of rest. Within a few years they had to reinstate it. Not for religious reasons but because the health of the nation had

collapsed. They were all burnt out. But some people feel guilty when they relax? Maybe you feel that way. But Jesus didn't. He took time off to rest and renew. Are you busier than Jesus? Is what you're doing more important than what Jesus did?

2) Recharge my emotions. What recharges you emotionally? Some need to be quiet. Some need recreation. Whatever it takes to get you re-charged, that's what you do. Introverts might need to isolate themselves. Extroverts might need to be in the midst of all sorts of people. It needs to be different from your daily grind, because in its origin, that's what holy meant, to be different and unique. And so we need to do something different on our Sabbath so we can recharge our spirit, recharge our soul, and recharge our emotions.

And we all need time for relationships. We were made for relationships. An article in Time magazine talked about the stress, anxiety and depression that is so prevalent in our society. It basically said that we weren't living the way we were supposed to live. We are designed to seek trusting relationships and we haven't spent nearly enough time seeking or growing any intimate connections. We need time to build and grow relationships. Sometimes I talk to a husband or wife who lament that their spouse is becoming distant. Often it's because they no longer make the commitment to spend time together to allow them to grow together, and so they grow apart. We need to recharge our emotions.

3) Refocus our spirit. The Bible calls this worship. Worship brings things into perspective. When we come into church with a big problem, worship puts things into perspective. We have more energy to deal with the problem and more understanding. We need time alone with God every day. If you're too busy for God, you're too busy. You're missing out on one of the very things for which you were made.

To make time for people who are important in our life, we need to do two more things.

A - ADJUST MY VALUES

In order to reduce busyness in my life I must change my thinking about what is important. Ecclesiastes 4:4 says, *"I've learned why people work so hard to succeed; it is because they envy the things their neighbors have."* We have to stop and say that we're not going to get caught up in the rat race of always getting more. There are some things more important than getting more. Mark 8:36 *"What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?"* Is it worth it? Ask yourself this question about every area in your life. We may be making great money right now, but are the kids getting any parenting? They're going to be gone in a few more years. Will I regret that? No matter how much you make, you can lose it all anyway. And we will lose it all at some time because we can't take the things with us. The relationships stay with us, but the things do not.

X - EXCHANGE MY PRESSURE FOR GOD'S PEACE

This gets at the very root of our stress. There are three kinds of fatigue. Physical fatigue. Tired muscles. That can be replenished pretty quickly. Then there's emotional fatigue. Tired feelings. And then there is spiritual fatigue. A dry spirit. That's the deepest, most devastating type fatigue. You may need a vacation. A vacation might help the physical fatigue, but probably not the other two. We need more than time off to recharge our emotions and focus our spirit. We need a relationship with God. You can take a two week vacation in Tahiti but when you come back you're still going to have the same problems. The pressures are still going to be there. So we need to do more than just take some time off. We need to readjust our values and exchange our

pressure for God's peace.

A little child does not like to lie down and rest. Resistance to rest is a mark of immaturity. If you're always working and never taking any time off, you're not only breaking the Ten Commandments, it also says that you are immature. Sheep don't like to rest, to lie down. But Psalm 23:2 says, "*He makes me lie down.*" That's forcing. Has God ever had to make you lie down? If you don't slow down, sometime God will just make you lie down. Because He cares about you. You matter to Him. So He will make us lie down just as we make our children rest.

There was a time when we lived our life with a certain pace. But over time, that pace has increased, and the whole world is moving fastest than it has throughout history. And we are moving as fast as we can just trying to keep up. And we're losing the battle, and getting tired. We need help to set a pace in life that's not too fast and not too slow. The only person wise enough to do that, who knows us inside and out better than we know ourselves, is Jesus Christ. We need a relationship with Him where we can exchange our pressure for His peace. When we live for God, it's not only the right way, it's the healthy way, the whole way, the balanced way, and the most relaxing way. For Jesus says, "*Come to me, all of you who are tired and have heavy loads, and I will give you rest... the load I give you to carry is light.*" (Matthew 11:28-29) Are you stressed out, tired, weary? Are you worn out or burned out? Jesus says, "Come to Me. I'm not going to load more on you. Come to Me. Get away with Me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with Me and work with Me. Watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy on you. Keep company with Me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly. Come to Me, so I can restore your soul." What a promise? What a grace? And in your life, may it be so. Amen.