

Rest Assured

One day, eight years ago, I could hardly catch my breath while playing an early morning game of adult hockey. I thought for sure it was old age, my waning body finally catching up with me. My wife, Sharon, finally convinced me to go to the doctor. Good thing I did. After four days of testing they found a mass of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma in my lower intestine. Within a matter of days, I began a five-month regimen of chemo and immunotherapy. As a result, the Lord taught me many valuable lessons about faith, trust and staying close to him through unexpected trials. I also learned a lot about cancer and that there is considerably more of it in our North American world today than ever before. In my recovery, I was told I had control over three things: better nutrition, more regular exercise, and pursuing less stress. Though all three objectives were equally compelling, what jumped out at me the most was less stress.

Many of you played a vital role in my recovery, for which I am very thankful. Your words of encouragement, prayers and love were constant and greatly appreciated by my family and me. We grew to appreciate Christian community in brand-new ways. However, taking time to read the Bible, reflect, and pray daily have been the most important new additions to my life. Finding an hour to rest and meditate each morning has helped reduce stress in my life enormously. Stress invites havoc in our bodies and cells in ways now being discovered by the medical community. Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma is a cancer of the white blood cells, which are vital to our immune systems. We all need strong immune systems, especially in keeping cancer cells at bay. Stress greatly weakens our immune system and threatens our overall well-being and physical health, especially in the hyper-modern world we live in today.

Rest and replenishment are too often neglected elements of our Christian life today. Our Christianity can be consumed by fast-paced, strobe lit, highly entertaining worship services, complete with on-the-run devotionals or podcasts. If we are not careful, we will eventually reduce our Christian experience to a 30-minute television show every Sunday morning, all by ourselves in the comfort of our living rooms with no one else around to bother us. But, what so often can get lost in our go-go Christianity is rest. Resting allows us to catch up with our own thoughts and feelings; it puts us



in a position to hear directly from God in prayer; it increases our capacity to love our neighbors as ourselves, and it replenishes our bodies and minds in unimaginable ways. The Bible reminds us that the ultimate rest for our souls can be found in the loving care of Jesus Christ. Life is incredibly burdensome and stressful apart from the guidance, peace and wisdom given to us by our Good Shepherd. The writer to the Hebrews put it best; "Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest is still open, let us take care that none of you should fail to reach it...asabbath rest still remains for the people of God; for those who enter God's rest cease from their labors as God did from his. Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest..." (Hebrews 4:1,9-11a)

We must allow our minds, bodies and souls to rest on a regular basis. God pleads with us to take a sabbath rest each week - to converse with God, each other and enjoy the beauty of his creation. Instead, many of us barrel into the weekend attending sporting events or running here or there, never unplugging from social media or the internet, and seeking pleasure and entertainment in nearly desperate, addictive ways. We can barely make it through a day without turning on the tv and filling our minds with other people's opinions and advertisements. But, as Scripture tells us, true rest is not found in entertainment or consuming another source of information; it is found in God, and in what God has provided for us in his son, Jesus Christ.



Frequently, a lack of rest in our lives produces agitation which too often gives birth to anger, contentiousness, and rancor. We can find ourselves on edge, defensive, and even suspicious when we have not gotten the rest we need. When the individual in Maryland we read about recently didn't like the articles that had been written about him in his local newspaper, his stewing became dark and eventually evil; he stormed the local newsroom and hunted down and killed those who were critical of him. This kind of tragic, heart-wrenching news is becoming too frequent in our modern society. People yelling and screaming at each other on television is becoming a norm. Hating those people with whom you have a disagreement is becoming a way of life on much of social media and even in town halls. Less and less people in America today are setting aside time to thank and enjoy God at least once a week, pursuing sabbath rest in their lives. As a result, unresolved, hurt feelings are piling up and turning into resentment, guilt and shame, which is producing more violence and familial or societal strife in our world today. People are either forgetting or neglecting what Jesus told his disciples long ago when he said, "You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder;' and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you

insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire."(Matthew 5:21-22)

Resting means taking the necessary time to listen to your own heart, receiving what God might want to tell you in any given day. His love and grace are not something we achieve; it is a gift we receive afresh each day. My Muslim friends here in Chicago often ask me why we Christians believe there is an assurance of salvation in Jesus Christ. Muslims, in general, work hard on their faith, being obedient as possible, in order to please God, especially in light of the final judgment day.

Muslims struggle with the idea that Christ paid the penalty for our sins by dying on a cross; that our job as humans is to rest, receive and believe in his atonement and accept this gift of grace and salvation from God. But, Muslims are not alone in this struggle. Most of us want to work hard and achieve, rather than rest, pray and receive. We have trouble believing that there is not something extra we can do to earn our salvation. But, God does not want to add to our already long list of "to-do's". He has already provided everything for us. Our job is simply to rest in it.



Sinner begging Jesus for healing and forgiveness

This fall, I will be taking a sabbatical from mid-September through mid-December. Every seven years, the Presbyterian Church urges its clergy to take a sabbatical rest for three months. Seven years ago, I missed my sabbatical because of my cancer. Therefore, after 22 years with Frontier Fellowship, I will be pursuing extended times of prayer, study, and marriage enrichment and travel opportunities with my wife, Sharon. We will be empty nesters at the end of this summer, too, which will open a new chapter in our life together. I am thankful for this opportunity to renew my energy, health, and soul, and give thanks for all that God has provided for me, my family and ministry. My family and I thank you for all your love and prayers. It's time to rest.