

SEQUOYAH HILLS
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“Experiencing God through Sabbath: Discovering”

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Hebrews 4:1-2

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We continue today in our series focusing on the Sabbath during this Lenten season. I hope you are, as I am, grateful for the work and insight Pastor Mark has put into drawing this series together, drawing from his time on sabbatical last summer. The purpose of a sabbatical, of course, is not just for the renewal of a pastor but of an entire church. Each week, we’re looking at a particular aspect of Sabbath.

Last week, we talked about maybe the most straightforward part of Sabbath: stopping. And as we continue this week, moving into the next couple of verses in the Book of Hebrews, there’s the glimpse of something better, once we start stopping: discovery.

Let’s go to God’s Word together.

Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest is still open, let us take care that none of you should seem to have failed to reach it. ² For indeed the good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them because they were not united by faith with those who listened. Hebrews 4:1-2

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.** Will you pray with me?

God of grace and peace, we thank you for your ever-present invitation to enter into your rest, that by your grace the door is not shut, though for so long so many of us have ignored it, ignored your call. Our eyes perhaps have grown callous or hesitant to look for it. Open our eyes, Lord. May we discover the beauty of a life spent in your rhythms and in harmony with your designs, rather than our own. And for the Word spoken and heard today, may it not be mine but yours. Amen.

Years ago, a friend of mine and I were catching up. After the standard reminiscing on old times, we turned to what we were looking at in the season coming up. He had just gotten married and was settling into a different career path in business, and so he was describing what his hopes were for the next few years.

He said, “You know man, these next few years, I just want to really dial in, focus on my career, and just *crush it*.” I hadn’t thought of that phrase in a while, but it came to mind this past

week. *Crushing it*, if you haven't heard that particular saying, well, you can probably tell just from context. Means you do really well, usually in the context of deals and business going through, hay going into the barn, making it rain, you know, *crushing it*.

Honestly, it became a bit of a meme years ago, usually sarcastic.

For example, "Just finished my seventh straight 18-hour day, first one in, last one to leave, ain't no one gonna outwork me. #Crushingit."

Or, "I'm twenty years into my career with two businesses under my belt and the only time I take to watch TV is when the Jets are on. There is so much hustle in my day I don't even have a second to spare to 'hang out' and catch up with the people around me." That one's real by the way. #crushingit

Or even, "I just finished a sermon, attendance and giving are rising, just welcomed a group of new members, all while going to five committee meetings a night and neglecting my family and ignoring my physical and spiritual health." #pastorcrushingit. Seriously though, this isn't just a corporate thing. Pastors get sucked into this all the time, myself included.

You can kind of get the picture. This idealization, even idolization of work can throw things completely into distortion. Now, this look at Sabbath is not an indictment of work or striving for excellence or even professional success, nor is the point that if you have a passion for your labor, or if you strive to be excellent in what you do in the home, office, school, or shop, or if you have had some success in those labors that you should feel bad about it. That's not the point. Work is not bad.

In fact it is very good. We were made for work. Our hands are not meant to be idle. Whether it's tilling the field or writing the report or healing the patient or nurturing the child, our labor is meant to be good. It's when that labor is distorted, when its purpose is distorted, that we lose sight of what's so good about it to begin with. We lose sight of the invitation into a holy rhythm, in which work in the Lord is good, and rest in the Lord is good, and one feeds the other.

That's something that these couple of verses in Hebrews are talking about. "Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest is still open, let us take care that none of you should seem to have failed to reach it." Like we talked about last week, in the background of these words are the people of Israel, invited and led by God to go into the Promised Land, but they get spooked by it, by how difficult it might be, and because they think it all depends on them, they turn away from this rest, this promise, into which God has been calling them. That's what "his rest" in this passage is referring to.

But as Hebrews tells us, the promise of entering that rest has not closed; it's still open. The calling, then, is that we take care not to miss it. And it makes you wonder, you know, how could

we possibly miss it? It sounds so great. Well, things get distorted. These rhythms of work and rest that are made to be good things get distorted into things they're not, and we do miss it.

Now, a lot of times, work gets distorted in truly harmful ways, exploitative ways. That's not really what I'm talking about here. Work that exploits others, or compels others into a distorted rhythm of work and rest, and the church should stand against such practices, but that's another sermon for another day. But what I'm talking about here is a voluntary, all-consuming obsession with our labor.

All those examples of crushing it, they're kind of in that world, that distorted world. Nothing wrong with hard work. Nothing wrong with striving for excellence. Nothing wrong with professional success. But what's usually behind this mindset of absolutely burning the candle at both ends, bringing about as much success as you can, you know, *crushing it*, is for the purpose of one day not having to do it anymore. Right?

For many, that's the whole ball game. It is the only reason you do what you do. Whether it's a targeted retirement date, or whether it's a matter of accumulating enough assets so that from their proceeds and passive income, your livelihood can more or less go on autopilot, the entire purpose of work or one's daily labor is to bring you to the point at which you no longer have to do it. Not saying preparing for retirement is bad, or retiring is inherently a bad thing. We shouldn't feel compelled to grind our fingers to the bone out of spite. Different kinds of work in different seasons of life.

But the premise can be a bit odd when it gets twisted, when the whole purpose, the whole direction of one's life is to work long enough and hard enough so that at some point you don't have to anymore.

Maybe some of us have thought that way. Just counting the days until we can hang it up. Or some goal in mind after which we'll be able to let up. I mean, my goodness, I know a pastor who literally keeps a countdown until he can retire, that is, until he qualifies for his full pension benefit. Surely there's more to life than that. Surely there's more to a life seeking Christ than just working hard enough so that someday we can avoid work altogether. Surely we can do better.

This is how twisted it's become. Theologian Norman Wirzba offers the following: "By most accounts, the average North American today enjoys one of the highest standards of living humanity has ever known. In fact, many of us lead comfortable and luxurious lives that heretofore would have been unimaginable to, let alone the envy of, kings and queens. Given our much-trumpeted prosperity and success, we should wonder why we don't really seem to enjoy our lives very much. For all that we have achieved, our lives, as viewed in their day-to-day ordinariness, do not appear measurably happier."

The goal of all that work, of *crushing it*, well, in large part, we've got it. Has it brought about the kind of fulfilment we thought it did? Not by a long shot. And like Israel wishing they had never been delivered from captivity, wishing instead that they could just die in the desert rather than follow the Lord into his rest, into the Promised Land, and being given up to wander in the wilderness, maybe we've seen the fruit of aimless labor too. We got exactly what we asked for. Did it do the trick? No.

Something kind of odd about Israel's return to the Promised Land, their entrance into the Lord's rest, because eventually of course they did. After years of wandering, God eventually did bring them into that promise. In some ways, it was a homecoming, a return to the land that had been promised to Israel's forebears. In other ways, it was nothing that any of them could possibly have known about. The people had been away from the land for centuries, and all they knew was captivity—part of the reason they wandered the wilderness for forty years, to flush that out of their system. So this rest was, for them, both a return home and a discovery. They're being brought back to how they were made to be, but it's also brand new to them too.

Do you think there's something of a discovery to be made for us and Sabbath? Is this rest in the Lord something that maybe we've gotten so distorted away from that it's going to feel brand new? I don't know how many of you took on just the small, practical step last week of stopping, even just for an evening, or a morning, to pray or to read Scripture, to *rest* in the Lord, but if you did, did it feel like discovering something? As in, whoa! So this is a glimpse of how it should be.

Some of you may know of the Pixar movie *WALL-E*—I feel like I'm referencing Pixar movies a bit lately, just shows what we have on at home. The premise of the movie *WALL-E* is a trash-collecting robot, set in a not-too-distant-future Earth. The planet has been trashed by pollution, and so Wall-E has been programmed to slowly clean it up, until he hitches a ride on a spaceship.

The ship takes him to something like a luxury space cruise, in which the remnants of humanity have for generations been 'enjoying' a life of leisure. People are shuttled around the spaceship in their own chairs which follow predetermined paths throughout all the decks of the ship. They all have gigantic sodas and snacks going along with them, all while they're watching a holographic screen that pops up in front of them. And this has happened for so long that all the people have become, well, unhealthy, shall we say, barely even able to move on their own.

Now, by some designs, this is exactly what we're working for, right? They don't have a care in the world. No job they have to worry about. Nothing they have to produce or complete. No assignments. No projects. Nothing. Just relaxing on this giant space cruise ship, every single day.

But then with Wall-E's arrival, things take place that shake up a handful of the passengers. They get jostled out of their predetermined paths that their chairs take them on. They start to look around. They start to look out the window and see the stars around the ship. Even the captain of the ship, who mostly just does things on autopilot—run by a robot named Otto, naturally—starts to discover things about how humanity functioned on Earth.

As the captain is watching all these old videos of life on Earth, he gets excited, because he's fed up with a life only spent catering to idleness. He exclaims to Otto, "Otto, Earth is amazing. These are called 'farms.' Humans would put seeds in the ground, pour water on them, and they would grow food like pizza." (If only that were true.)

Now that example is kind of the other end of the spectrum of where Israel was. Israel was coming out of a place of severely distorted work. The people in Wall-E were coming out of a place of severely distorted rest. But in both, there's this coming home to a place they never actually knew. So there's a discovery about it.

Is this discovery something that you've felt? Maybe you've spent your entire life, whether it's been in school, in work, or in whatever path you've found yourself on, maybe you've spent your entire life thinking you were locked in, a preset course, and if you crushed it enough, you'd find yourself getting what you wanted. Maybe those goals have been tough to reach. Or maybe you got what you were looking for. Either way, has it been worth it? Has it fulfilled all the longings that have defined your life up to this point? You already know the answer to that.

Maybe there's something for us to discover in this invitation into the Lord's rest. Maybe we've missed it our entire lives. Maybe the way we've gone about work and rest both have distorted things so much that we haven't been able to see it, much less step into it. But now that it's here, in front of us, on the cusp of the Promised Land, so to speak, will we step into that discovery? Maybe then we'll find out that the good news of a life in Christ applies not just to our souls but to our roles.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.