

Taking the Day Off **June 6, 2010**

When I was in seminary my final semester I took a class called “Biblical Ecology”. Our professor was an Old Testament scholar and believed that Exodus was the greenest book in the Bible. I am not sure what she would think of this depiction of the 10 Commandments from Exodus. The book of Exodus teaches us the importance of a person’s identity with the land. For families in this time you were what your land was. If you didn’t have land you were of little value. Land meant something to your family and who God created you to be. So if your land is a part of who you are—how you treat your land was very important as well. It is in Exodus that the Children of God received the 10 Commandments. Here, God instructs humans on how to live. The 10 Commandments can be studied in two sections. The first section teaches us about our relationship with God. 1. No other gods than me. 2. No idols—that would take away from our relationship with God. 3. Don’t take the Lord’s name in vain. (This makes playing a round of golf difficult for many.) 4. Remember the Sabbath – If you rest than you are reminded that you are not in control—God is. 5. Honor your parents (currently my favorite commandment) 6. Don’t murder. 7. Don’t commit adultery—remain faithful to one your are with. 8. Don’t steal. 9. Don’t lie. And 10. Don’t be jealous of what other’s have. God does not tell Moses that one commandment is more important than another. He just gives him the commandments.

Prior to the Israelites wondering in the desert where they received the 10 Commandments they were living as slaves in Egypt until Moses led them out of bondage. For some, this new found freedom was not a welcomed way of life. They were wondering, they were nomads without a home and they were hungry and thirsty. Worst of all, they were losing their minds because instead of welcoming the rest from hard, grueling labor they began complaining about everything. Some even said that they would rather return as slaves! The Lord had answered their prayers and cries for help and within a small amount of time they had already forgotten what God had done. They were consumed with what they needed, wanted and desired. They were focused on being in control of their life. What they forgot was if God made land so important than didn’t they realize they were so much more important than land.

And, if God cared how they treated the land – then don’t you think God really, really cares how we treat and care for ourselves.

Unfortunately, not much has changed in this area of human being’s personalities over the last couple thousand years. Well, perhaps I shouldn’t speak for all of you, but I do enjoy knowing the major details of my life like where I will be today, what work I will be doing, where I will be tomorrow—these are items in my life I don’t like to give up control. Several years ago I was working as an Associate Pastor at a church in Greensburg, IN. My position was the typical Associate job in a smaller community—I was the Director of Youth, Education, Missions and Outreach. I also was responsible for helping do pastoral care to our large homebound membership and preaching. Dave was working up the road at a different church so, you could add “Preacher’s Wife” to my list and you get a pretty good idea of how many different hats I was wearing. I had that terrible feeling that I was doing a lot of things but nothing really well. Then, to make sure we really went crazy, we added a child to our mix! Now I was a mom and felt torn in too many directions. I was beginning to realize that something had to give.

Like the Dr. Cox thought I was taking a break. I was taking an hour for lunch. I was going home earlier (but taking my work with me.) I was in a bubble where although I thought I was resting everything was still around me. This is a make believe Sabbath and God can tell the difference—so can we when our bodies begin to rundown. The imaginary bubble is not enough you have to remove yourself from the chaos so that you can think, rest, be still and remember God is in control. So, here I was living in this bubble that had holes and cracks—I was not taking care of myself—God’s creation. Instead of living joyfully—I was sluggish and rundown. I was not living by Ferris Bueller’s credo. I was going into work on beautiful, sunny days.

About this time, I was invited on a girls’ get-away with a good friend of mine. So, I decided to skip school so to speak for a whole week! I needed to figure out how I should be living so that I could begin myself like God’s amazing creation. While gone for those short few days I tried to be quiet. In my quietness I began to hear God calling me to something so different and radical from anything I had ever done. I heard God calling me to Stop. At first, I thought – well, I am doing just that God—I am on vacation. But, the message was clear—God was telling me to stop. Stop trying to do

everything. Stop trying to control everything in hopes of holding on to this insane schedule. I had been so busy doing the work of being a pastor that I had taken my eyes off God. And in my busyness I lost sight of where God was taking me.

When I decided to take a break from ministry and work more on being a mom and seeking who God wanted me to be I was able to breathe again. When I worshiped for the last time at Greensburg, I was 8 months pregnant with our second child. There was this anticipation of what was to come in a new way that didn't involve a career. Instead, I was thinking of how our family would become whole again after being scattered for three years. As each day went by, I began to let go of the reigns a little more and what I received in exchange was a deeper understanding of God's peace than I had before in my life. I began to notice the relationships in my life that had been under stress because I was so busy doing God's work—began to mend. My daughter and I reconnected in a very special way and Dave and I began to work as a team again.

Henri Nouwen once said that the noise of our lives made us deaf, unable to hear when we are called, or from which direction. How many of you have taken a full day off in the last month. No email, no returning calls, no Facebook, no work? Just a day of rest. As a pastor, finding time for Sabbath can be one of the toughest parts of my job. There seems to always be one more thing to do. The truth is, if we wait until our work is finished to rest we will never do it. There is always one more thing to do, one more call to make. I once heard it said like this, "Sabbath liberates us from the need to be finished." Isn't that great – we get to take a pass on doing that one more thing because Sabbath saves us. When we stop we surrender ourselves to God and remember that we are not in control. Even if we get that one more thing accomplished—we are still not God. Because we are freed from being in control of the world we should be able to rest our souls and reconnect with God and with whom God created us to be.

Back to the 10 Commandments. I mentioned that they are broken into two parts: how we relate to God and how we should relate to one another. God believed that Sabbath was so important to the way we relate to our Creator that it was put in the same category as "Don't Kill". Now, I don't know about you all but I take the "thou shalt not murder thy neighbor" pretty

seriously. So, why then don't we take Sabbath just as seriously. Sabbath requires surrender. Sabbath requires letting go. Sabbath is required.

When Dave and I moved to Haiti I was your stereotypical Type A personality. I could multi-task with the best of them. I had my lists and my calendars and my schedule – I was wound up pretty tight. Then we were dropped in the middle of no where – literally. No phone, no internet, no other English speaking people, no car, no real responsibilities at first. I thought I was going to die. I had many shouting conversations with God that went something like this "Are you kidding me??" When we returned from our time in Haiti we did many talks with the churches that helped support us during our stay in Haiti. One of the questions we got often was, "Were you able to save any of the Haitians?" We would just smile and say politely, "No, but they sure did save us." God took this Type A child and broke me. I don't mean just a little either – God broke me and reminded me who was in control. Did I have to be called all the way to Haiti to learn a new way of the finding a rhythm of life? I really think so. Once I surrendered to God and to let go of my desire to control—life got a lot easier.

Once we clear away the chaos and quiet our souls – only then can we begin to hear God's workings in our lives. We are so occupied with all the ways we can remain in touch with one another that we forget that God longs to hear from us too. We are called to stop—breathe—allow God to overwhelm us in our lives. As we close I want to leave you this quote from Wayne Muller who wrote an excellent book on Sabbath—I wish I could have come up with this myself, he said, "Only in the soil of Sabbath tranquility can we seed the possibility or beginning of a new day, a new week—even a new life—again and again, each time with fresh eyes, rested and refreshed, born within the completely gratuitous sanctuary of time." May you enjoy your day of rest. May God call you to something new in your quietness. May you reconnect with a love, a friend, a good book or even with yourself.