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Slow Down, You Move too Fast

Psalm 46:1-11

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Cape Cod is known for its beaches. You don't have to go far to see a lovely sunrise or a stunning sunset, or to walk in the sand, seeing what treasures the tide brought in. Walking the beach, you can find all kinds of shells, including scallops, oysters, mussels, whelks, and moon snails, as well as sea glass and stones whose rough edges have been worn away by the waves and sand. In many Cape Cod homes and cottages, there are seashells, stones, and sea glass that people have chosen to keep because of how beautiful they are. Every shell was once the home of a living creature that's left something beautiful behind, and that can inspire you to do the same. Are you living your life in such a way that when you're gone, you'll leave something beautiful behind? If a snail can do it, you can, too!

Today, we're beginning a new six week series called **Leave Something Beautiful Behind**. Each week, we'll be looking at something we can do, a choice we can make, that can help us to create a beautiful and enduring legacy. These will include how we use the time we're given and taking time to rest and pray; using our spiritual gifts in service; being good stewards of creation via the choices we make, so that we leave a healthy planet to future generations; using technology wisely, as a tool, so it serves us and our relationships, rather than it shaping us in harmful ways; managing our financial resources well, so we can live generously and support worthy projects, as close as the Cape and around the world, via our ABCUSA Global Servants and our missionary partners. Life is precious and fleeting, and we want to live it well, so when our time on earth is through, we will have left something beautiful behind us that's a blessing to others and honors God. This all begins with a right relationship with God, and learning how to be still, to take time with the Lord in prayer, which drives out our fear and gives us a sense of calmness and stability, even in stressful times. Listen to *Psalm 46:1-11*.

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the

holy habitation of the Most High. **God is in the midst** of the city; it shall not be moved; **God will help** it when the morning dawns. The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts. **The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.** Come, **behold** the works of the Lord; see what desolations he has brought on the earth. He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire. **‘Be still, and know that I am God!** I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth.’ **The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.”**

How good are you at taking time to be still? For some of us, it may come easily because of our temperament — if we’re introverted, if we like quiet, silence, and solitude, being still is not only something we desire and enjoy, it’s restorative and renewing. Others may have more time to be still than they wish, due to physical limitations or challenges that make it difficult to go out with, or engage with, other people. For those who are more extraverted, who gain energy from being with others, the idea of being still, being alone with God and our thoughts and feelings, can be unappealing. For most of human history, it was easier to be still and take time with God. There were billions less people around, and, in the days before electricity, there were fewer ways one could spend time. Think about how much time you spend on your computer, phone, or watching television. One estimate is that the average American spends about 2,580 hours a year looking at a screen, which translates to 107.5 days a year. If you consider the fact that you spend close to a third of your life sleeping, these numbers are staggering. What is the consequence of all these devices that electricity and technology have made possible?

For the first time in human history, we can’t be alone with our thoughts because we have our phones and other devices as constant companions. In June, Richard Simon’s book, “Unplug: How to Break Up with Your Phone and Reclaim Your Life”, was released. **In it, he claims that the average American spends the equivalent of more than 75 full days a year looking at their phone.** It can become an all-consuming addiction that puts a strain on virtually every facet of our existence, from the way we sleep, eat, and exercise, to our ability to focus and make new memories. Most importantly, it takes us away from our lives, our relationships, and the real world. Kyler Barr will be sharing more about this with us next month, but my point today is that it’s

much harder for us to take time to be still, rest, and pray, and yet, we probably need to do those things more than ever for our own well-being.

I know at least one person who is looking forward to the NFL season kicking off this Thursday night, when the Super Bowl Champion Philadelphia Eagles host the Dallas Cowboys. One of the things you see on TV, with any sporting event, is replays. When a replay is shown, you're looking at something that already happened — only you look at it with the benefit of slow motion and multiple angles. Slowing down the action provides a better perspective than trying to see everything that happens, at full speed. Multiple angles provide you with other views and perspectives that sometimes lead to calls being changed, because the action has been seen more clearly.

When God commanded us to take a Sabbath day every seventh day to refrain from work, to step off life's ever-accelerating treadmill, to worship, to reflect, to enjoy time with family and friends, God was, in a sense, encouraging us to **look at a replay of our life — to slow things down** and to look back at our week from a variety of perspectives — how did it go spiritually, relationally, physically, mentally, and emotionally? Are there changes to be made; decisions to be reconsidered; relationships to be addressed; spiritually, have we fed our spirits or only stressed ourselves out? Those of you who are thinking, "I can't possibly observe a Sabbath or take a day to rest and do those things" are the people who probably need it most. The invitation of *Psalms 46* to be still and know God, to take refuge in the Lord, is very much in line with the commandment to observe the Sabbath and keep it holy.

When it comes to stress, we can have too much or too little. Too little stress is dull and boring. People can rust out for lack of activity, movement, challenge, and involvement in life. A certain amount of stress is positive, motivational, and contributes to creativity. However, too much stress, especially prolonged stress over a long period of time, is harmful and dangerous. We can be out of touch with our feelings and our bodies, and often wait too long when something is not physically right. This is not healthy. When our threshold of stress is surpassed, several bad things happen:

- Loss of Perception – We're not as observant at picking up subtle details around us.
- Loss of Options – We don't see them, and our attitude can deteriorate, as we feel trapped.

- Regression to Infantile Behavior – We do, or say, something that we regret.
- Fatigue/Depression – We need more rest and sleep.
- Physical Illness – Eventually stress can kill you.

Many of us could benefit from reclaiming control of our time, and heeding God's command, for our benefit, to take a Sabbath day on a weekly basis. Being still and resting in a *Psalms 46* "Be still and know that I am God" kind of way would be a blessing for probably all of us.

One of Jill's favorite songs is Simon and Garfunkel's, "The 59th Street Bridge Song (Feelin' Groovy)". It includes the lyrics: "**Slow down, you move too fast.** You got to make the morning last. Just kicking down the cobblestones. Looking for fun and feelin' groovy. Hello, lamppost, what'cha knowin'? I've come to watch your flowers growin'." Even in late summer, we can slow down and watch flowers growing. Many years ago, we were walking our sons to Eddy Elementary School, and Greg was going slower than I wanted to go — and we were falling behind Jill and Nathan. When I urged Greg to go faster, he said, as he looked at daffodils and not at me, "I just want to walk." To this day, Greg is good at being still and observing the Sabbath, and he's still teaching me. Many of us could benefit from regularly slowing down, being still and knowing that God is God and we are not. To slow down in a culture that is speeding up is difficult to do, but there is more to life than increasing its speed. **What are some things you can do?**

Take Time Off to Be Still and Rest— even God did. We can do what the Lord has encouraged us to do. We can take regular Sabbath time, and define ourselves not so much by our work, but by our relationship with God and with other people.

Now may be a time for many of us to slow down, be still, and rest. Caregivers need to slow down and take a break from caring to do something for themselves before they need care, too. Those with difficult illnesses or chronic physical conditions can direct their minds to the Lord, to whatever is pure, lovely, pleasing, and worthy of praise, and all the things Paul mentions in *Philippians 4:9*. Those who are grieving may need to slow down, be patient with themselves, and not rush through the grieving process. Those with hectic lifestyles and many commitments and responsibilities need to slow down — perhaps even shed some of their activities — and be still before the Lord to ask for renewed faith and strength.

Prayer is a great stress reducer and perspective giver. Paul says that when we pray with thanksgiving, the peace of God will stand sentry watch over us — never sleeping or deserting us. We can cease frantic, relentless activity, and be still, even for a few moments, or minutes, or a minute. Thanks to the craftsmanship and kindness of Tom Yocom, we have a small gift to encourage you to do just that. On one side, it says, “Take a minute to recite *Psalm 46:10*, ‘Be still and know that I am God.’” On the other side, it says, “Take a minute to... Pray, Remember, Give Thanks, Listen, Confess, Forgive, Do a Good Deed.” It’s remarkable how, even taking a minute or two to sit down, slow our breathing, and meditate on a verse of scripture, or an image of God, or a word, can benefit us. Light a candle; watch a sunrise or sunset; observe a bird or an animal; turn off the television, radio, computer, and phone; go out in nature. Take time off, and use the time wisely for renewal, not in such a way that you come back more exhausted than when you left.

Set Boundaries — which includes taking control of your schedule. You don’t love people less if you invite them to fit into your schedule, rather than trying to fit yourself into theirs. Beware of the reasons we don’t set boundaries: fear of rejection, desire to please, lack of personal discipline, misplaced values, an inability to prioritize, and a failure to realize that it is okay to schedule oneself.¹

Know whether it’s time to do something for ourselves, or for someone else. This requires discernment in being able to tell when we need to get out of ourselves and our problems and issues by doing something for someone else (we’re guarding against self-absorption), and when we need to take some time in solitude, journaling, or renewing for ourselves (We also have to be careful we’re not always with other people because we don’t want to face ourselves.). **Exercise** (“sweat to forget”). Do something — go for a walk, a swim, a run, a bike ride; do something to get your heart rate up, your blood flowing, and eliminate some stress and help yourself at the same time. **Talk with someone — don’t be afraid to ask for help.** Sometimes, the perspective of another person, and expressing our feelings aloud, is helpful. There’s an excellent article in “The Athletic” this week, featuring Olympic Gold Medalist swimmer

¹ Leith Anderson, *Leadership That Works*, 153, (From the Minnesota Baptist Conference Pastor’s Council, November 25, 1997), 155.

Michael Phelps, about anxiety and depression — and it highlights that **people underestimate just how much they can benefit from talking with other people.**

Nurture important relationships with friends and family. As much as it depends on you, **seek to resolve conflict in personal relationships** through confession and forgiveness. Follow Jesus' guidelines in *Matthew 18:15-17* for dealing with conflict and confrontation. Holding on to anger is like drinking poison and thinking our enemy is going to die. Keeping short emotional accounts is healthy and helpful.

Laugh daily.

Henri Nouwen wrote, "Discipline means to prevent everything in your life from being filled up. Discipline means that somewhere you are not occupied, and certainly not preoccupied. In the spiritual life, discipline means to create space in which something can happen you had not planned on or counted on." Clocks are made to run 24/7; people are not. It's vitally important to our lives to regularly take time to rest, to be still, and to listen to God, recognizing that God's commands are given to us in love, for our benefit. Don't forget, in the busyness of life, to seek some Sabbath rest, to be still and take time each day to pray and be quiet. The life you bless, refresh, and heal may just be your own. An unhurried life is far more likely to leave something beautiful behind.

Prayer: Dear Lord, Help us to learn, from your Word and your example, how to prioritize our time. Help us to understand the spirit behind your command to remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy, so we may rest, recover, renew, and worship. You told us to be still and rest because we desperately need to. Lord, forgive us for our worrying and striving, as though everything somehow depended on us. We look to you now, as the One who restores our souls. We look to you, the One who said: "*Come unto me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest.*" That's what we want to do today. Fill us with the presence and peace of your Holy Spirit. And help us to be still and to know that you are God, for our own benefit, and for the benefit of others. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. *Psalm 46* reminds us, “Be still and know that I am God.” How easy or difficult is it for you to slow down and be still before God? What tends to get in the way?
2. The sermon compares Sabbath rest to watching a “replay” of your life — slowing things down to see more clearly, from different perspectives. If you were to look back on your last week, in “slow motion,” what would you notice about your spiritual, emotional, physical, or relational life?
3. The presence and use of technology is one of the main barriers to stillness in our time. What practices or boundaries could help you use your devices more wisely, so they serve you, rather than control you?
4. Too little stress can leave us unmotivated, but too much stress harms our health and relationships. Where do you see yourself on that spectrum right now, and what might God be inviting you to adjust?
5. The idea of Sabbath rest isn’t just about stopping work, but about creating space for God, relationships, and renewal. What might a life-giving Sabbath look like for you in this season of your life?
6. The sermon asks: “Are you living your life in such a way that, when you’re gone, you’ll leave something beautiful behind?” How would you answer that question right now? What kind of legacy do you hope to leave?