

## Pause on Purpose

Deuteronomy 5:12-15 and Matthew 11:28

Have you noticed there has been a change in the way people greet one another? Instead of a simple greeting like “hi,” or “Hello,” it’s much more common to hear “How are you?” To which the most common response I hear is “Busy.”

This is just one of the signs for me that our world worships the false god of insatiable productivity. When asked how we are, we boldly proclaim “busy” as if it is a badge of honor. But I contend busyness is a sin and it’s ranked right up there with murder, adultery, and stealing. Busyness is a tactic Satan uses to keep us from seeing the wisdom, the importance of rest and time with our God.

At the Global Leadership Summit a few weeks ago I heard Juliet Funt, owner of Whitespace at Work, talking about the trap of frantic busyness – our schedules are so overflowing that we’ve squeezed out any time for pause. We live at 100% exertion and 0% thoughtfulness. We are too busy to become less busy. And that comes with a cost. It takes a toll on our health and wellbeing, our relationships, our joy, even our productivity. Our culture is worshipping at the altar of busyness.

Wayne Muller, in his book *“Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal and Delight in Our Busy Lives”* writes: “Without rest, we respond from survival mode, where everything we meet answers a terrifying prominence. When we are driving a motorcycle at high speed, even a small stone in the road can be a deadly threat. So, when we are moving faster and faster, every encounter, every detail inflates in importance, everything seems more urgent than it really is – and we react with sloppy desperation.”<sup>1</sup>

This frantic overload is not only detrimental to our physical, emotion, mental and social well-being but also hinders our spiritual well-being, our relationship with God. We fill every moment of our schedules so full that we don’t allow time to connect with Lord.

Jeff and I watched the movie *The Shack* Friday night and one part of the movie really grabbed my attention – the main character Mac was meeting the character of God face to face and God told Mac that all God ever wanted was friendship, to be in relationship with us. If you think back to the beginning of Genesis – this is how it was meant to be – humans in intimate relationship with their creator.

That's what Moses is reminding the people about in our first reading from Deuteronomy 5. Observe the Sabbath by keeping it holy. Holy simply means set apart for God. Sabbath is a day set apart for our relationship with the Lord our God. You have 6 days for work but the 7<sup>th</sup> day is a day of rest dedicated to the Lord.

Then Moses continues with the why Sabbath is important - Remember you *were* slaves in Egypt but God brought you out with his strong and powerful arm. God now gives you this commandment, this stipulation of his covenant, as a gift. You are no longer a slave, you are no longer forced to work every day. You have been given the gift of freedom from those taskmasters and as a gift for your well-being God wants you to have a day of rest, whitespace, a pause from the busyness so we can focus on our relationship, our friendship with God.

I think it is interesting that these words about “remember you were a slave” weren't in the Exodus record of the 10 commandments – when the covenant was first made. The words in Deuteronomy are added 40 years later, after they've spent 40 years in the wilderness just as they are ready to enter the Promised Land. Moses calls them all together to give his final words, his last speech. Moses reminds them of all God has done to care for them up to this point, he outlines principles for Godly living (everything they had been learning in the 40years of wilderness school) and he calls for them to recommit their lives to God.

I wonder why Moses had to add in this part about remember you were slaves. Were the people already showing a tendency to forget? Were they already beginning to worship at the altar of busyness? Or did Moses just have the wisdom, the foresight to

know that as they entered the Promised Land and were faced with all the work of building and settling that the temptation of excess work would be great? Whatever his motivation, Moses urges the people to remember the work they were forced to do back in Egypt so they might avoid the sin of busyness and remember God has given a gift of rest for re-creation and space to nurture a relationship with God.

I'm reminded of a story Max Lucado tells, in his book *Cure for the Common Life*.

“Ernie Johnson Jr. knows baseball. His father announced three decades worth of major-league games, following the Braves from Milwaukee to Atlanta. In the quarter century since Ernie Jr. inherited the microphone, he has covered six sports on three continents, voicing blowouts and nail-biters, interviewing losers and buzzer beaters.

But one game stands out above all the rest. Not because of who played, but because of who stopped playing. Ernie was 9-year old Little Leaguer, dutifully playing shortstop. An opposing batter hit a ground rule double that bounced over the fence. Two outfielders scampered over the fence to retrieve the ball so the game could continue. (Apparently the league operated on a tight budget.)

Both teams waited for them to return. They waited...and waited...but no one appeared. Concerned coaches finally jogged into the outfield and scaled the fence. Curious players, including Ernie, followed them. They found the missing duo just a few feet beyond the fence, gloves dropped on the ground, found ball at their feet, blackberries and smiles on their faces.”<sup>iii</sup>

Both Ernie Johnson, Sr and Ernie Johnson, Jr. often refer to special moments in life as “Blackberry moments”. “Ernie, Jr. believes we may not see the delicious blackberries God puts into our lives unless we step outside of our normal responsibilities and become attentive to what’s happening around us. Intensity of focus is a great strength ... until it becomes tunnel vision. We can be so

driven and work so hard that we miss life's most important blessings along the way....Hard work, striving, those sorts of things are important, but one thing Johnson won't say when he gets near the end of his life is "Man, I wish I'd spent more time in the office".....[He says] "If I'm getting too focused on the game, I'm going to miss the blackberry moments, the sweet moments, and they are there for the picking every day".<sup>iii</sup>

We all need blackberry moments, we need to intentionally pause in the frantic busyness of life in order to notice all the delicious blackberries God puts into our lives.

Jesus understood this. In the frenzied pace of his ministry with all of its demands, Jesus knew he had to step away from the game. When the apostles returned from their first missionary expedition, Jesus said "*Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.*" Even though there was definitely work to be done, people coming and going, Jesus knew the importance of taking a break, getting away from the crowd to rest.

There will always be more work to do and other people's expectations and even demands putting pressure on you. But look to the model of our Savior. "Jesus said no to good things so he could say yes to the right thing."<sup>iv</sup> Throughout the gospels there are numerous examples of Jesus getting away, taking a break, and reconnecting with his Father. This is Sabbath.

"Sabbath is time for sacred rest; it may be a holy day, the seventh day of the week, as in the Jewish tradition, or the first day of the week, as for Christians. But Sabbath time may also be a Sabbath afternoon, a Sabbath hour, a Sabbath walk – indeed, anything that preserves an.... experience of life-giving nourishment and rest. ....Sabbath time is time off the wheel, time when we take our hand from the plow and let God and the earth care for things, while we drink, if only for a few moments from the fountain of rest and delight."<sup>v</sup>

"We must have a period in which we lie fallow, and restore our souls... remember to celebrate what is beautiful and sacred....

[Sabbath] is time to let our work, our lands, our animals lie fallow, to be nourished and refreshed.”<sup>vi</sup>

As faithful followers of Jesus, may we follow his example, may we receive the gift of Sabbath, may we pause on purpose so we can enjoy and savor the Blackberry moments God puts in our lives.

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<sup>i</sup> Wayne Muller, *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives*. (New York: Bantam Books, 1999), 5.

<sup>ii</sup> Max Lucado, *Cure for the Common Life: Living in Your Sweet Spot*. (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2005), 103

<sup>iii</sup> <http://onlineathens.com/local-news/2017-05-05/uga-commencement-speaker-ernie-johnson-shared-sweet-blackberry-moments>

<sup>iv</sup> Lucaod, 107.

<sup>v</sup> Muller, 7-8.

<sup>vi</sup> Muller, 7.