

Margins 1 – God’s Permission to STOP
September 8, 2013
Genesis 2:1-3 and Exodus 20:8-11

The series we are beginning today is going to be a tough one. It is going to highlight areas of weakness in most of our lives. I know it is in mine. In essence, this series is a stewardship sermon – four weeks about our stewardship of time. Because here is the thing – we all have different levels of income and possess different amounts of wealth, but we all have the same amount of time to use. The world gives us clocks, but God gives us time. And just as the Hebrew people were slaves to the Egyptians, we have become slaves to our schedules, we have become slaves to our work, and we have become slaves to technology (those who know me know that one hurts). We have become slaves to time instead of time being a tool for us to use. So, over these next few weeks, we are going to look at Margins and how we can build margin into our lives to really live.

It is in the margins of life that we find out how to truly live, because it is in these margins that we learn how to be freed from those things that enslave us. Margins give us time - time to grow and learn. Over the next four weeks, we will look at creating margin in our lives to foster our relationship with God, margin to foster our relationships with each other – our family and friends, and margin to live into the future that God has for us. Today, we are going to look at Margin to REST.

The sermon series title comes from the margins on paper – whether notebook paper or word processor paper. They have margins. Can you imagine what a paper would look like if it went from the edge of the paper on one side to the edge of the paper on the other side, from the very top to the very bottom? Can you imagine if there was no punctuation in this writing, either? What if it was just one long run on sentence that stretched the entire span of a piece of paper? I dare say most of us would not read it. It would be intimidating simply to look at, much less read. It is in the paper having margins that it looks appealing, and in having appropriate pauses – commas, periods, question marks that it becomes readable. The times the text asks us to stop, help it to better communicate to us. So it is with our lives, too. It is in our pauses that our life is better understood. It is when we STOP that we find greater clarity.

We know that in the beginning of Genesis, the Bible begins with the story of creation. For six days, God created, and everything came into being through God speaking it. But we erroneously think that God ceased from creating on the seventh day. That is not the case. On the seventh day it says God rested. Now, it is important to note that God does not get tired. He is not hindered by human attributes. It is also important to note that up unto this point there has never been anything like this “rest” God was doing. So on this day after God created human beings, he created REST. He modeled it so that Adam and Eve and all human beings that followed them would understand that REST is part of the created order and should be a part of our rhythm of life. It is in the pauses that we are able to prepare ourselves to live fully. It is when we STOP that we gain clarity of purpose.

Note, though, that we are not created to rest. There is work to be done, and for six days God worked at his creative tasks and modeled that, too, but it is in the pauses, in the margin, in the rest that we can gain better perspective.

But we tend to fall out of balance more on the “work” side than the “rest”. We tend to try to fit too much into our lives, rather than not enough. So, at just the right time when God’s people were beginning to form a society, God gave them an outline for what a healthy life would look like. There are actually 613 Hebrew laws, but God set out the top ten in glorious fashion, giving them a higher standard in people’s lives. The interesting thing about these top ten rules is that the first three are all about how we relate to God – No Gods before me, do not worship graven images, and do not use the Lord’s name in vain. The last six are about how we relate with each other – honor your father and mother, don’t kill, commit adultery, steal, bear false witness, or covet.

But it is the fourth command that links the first three and the last six together. It is this fourth commandment that helps us to bring heaven on earth. Interestingly, the fourth commandment is the longest and most detailed of the Ten Commandments. Also, it is the only one that begins – REMEMBER. God knows we tend to forget. We set reminders on our phones to buzz us for meetings, and we circle dates on calendars and set alarms to wake up, to be sure we do things; but do we remind ourselves to STOP and REST?

The core of Sabbath is about restraint. It is about intentionally not doing everything all the time just because we can. Setting aside a day of rest helps us reconnect with our Creator and find the peace of God that passes all understanding. Sabbath is about letting go of the controls one day a week and letting God be God.

It’s funny; my son will fight, kicking and screaming sometimes, having to take a nap. It will be obvious to us that he is tired and needs to rest; yet he refuses. When we finally get him down and asleep, two hours later he will wake up a different child. That monster has gone and my sweet boy has returned. It is no different for us when we get older. We are able to mask it better, and our social and cultural cues tell us we cannot go running around throwing things and crying and screaming, but when we are not able to rest, we are not at our best, and are not able to live life to its fullest.

But here is the thing: like a child who grows accustomed to not getting the sleep he or she needs, we can get used to a faster and harder and more intense pace of life to the point where we feel like we are handling it fine. We do not recognize the toll that it is taking on us and our ability to optimize who we are. But when we push ourselves that close to the limits, when we get that close to the edge and leave no margin or room for error, then we are coming perilously close to going over the edge. We can probably all recall a point in our lives when that was the case. We seem to be balancing it all and juggling just fine, no matter how many balls we have in the air, then something gets thrown at us out of the blue and we lose it all. That is not how God intends our lives to be.

So God created rest, modeled it to us, and gave it to us as a gift. He reminded us that it is important, and showed us that in our Sabbath, our stopping and resting, we find a bridge from earth to heaven. It's a time when we can experience heaven now and it can impact everything that we do.

In the Gospel, Jesus says to us, "Come to me, you who are weary, and you will find rest!" Jesus is calling us back to the Sabbath. He is reminding us that we are human BEINGS, not human DOINGS. Before we are to "do", we are called simply to "be"! And in stopping and resting, we are receiving one of the truly special gifts that God has given to us.

Sabbath is important...REST is important. We have to make time in our lives to stop, and if one day out of seven seems too intimidating to you right now, then let me suggest you start by carving out 6 hours, or 4, or even 2 so you can experience heaven today. We have to build margin in our lives to rest so that we can live our lives to the fullest.

One final thing – when we rest, we are reminded that the world can in fact continue on without us, and that is a good thing to be reminded of on a regular basis. I know I need reminding of that regularly, and I probably need some of you to remind me how arrogant I can be when I think that God's church will fall if I am not there to prop it up. It was there long before me and will be here long after me – and so will this world after you and I are long gone. Our job is to do our part – to be a disciple, to create and to build on the Kingdom of God, but it means we seek to live our lives to the best of our abilities and that means we have to REST!

THANKS BE TO GOD!

AMEN