



1200 Lexington Road
Wilmore, KY 40390

Pastor Daryl Diddle

(859) 858-3521
office@wfmc.net

“Remembering To Rest”

Sermon Series: *Jesus’ Healthy Habits*, No. 3

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Luke 5:12-16

While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.”

13 Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” And immediately the leprosy left him. 14 Then Jesus ordered him, “Don’t tell anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.”

15 Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. 16 But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

We’re in Luke 5 this morning, if you’d care to turn back there...Luke chapter 5, where the snapshot of Jesus’ ministry we’re given can be surprising...even shocking, on the surface of it.

How so?

Well, it was certainly shocking to everyone around that this leprous man showed up there in town...even winding his way into the middle of the sort of crowd that always surrounded Jesus! Those with contagious diseases like that were to stay far away from others, so the fact that he put himself there in their midst shocked those around him.

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It also would have surprised the man himself to have Jesus actually touch him. No one touched people with leprosy; he’d probably not been touched by another human being for years and years...and he certainly didn’t expect to be touched by Jesus. But he was, which surely took him by surprise.

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It was also certainly a shock to the crowd there to witness a very obvious healing right before their eyes. This fellow’s sickness was not some invisible, internal thing. The effects of skin diseases like these were very unpleasantly apparent...but that means that the healing was also very apparent. The open sores “immediately” dried up, verse 13 says.

A startling transformation...right before their eyes.

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Another surprise, then, would surely have been to hear Jesus say to the fellow, “Don’t tell anyone.”

Now, this is not the only time we hear this from Jesus, and it’s confusing, since we’d tend to think other people needed to know about what had happened, so they might, themselves...you know...be convinced of who Jesus is.

But Jesus didn’t see it that way. Yes, Jesus welcomed the sick and had compassion on them, but physical healing was not His primary reason for coming to earth. He did not want *only* the sick to hear Him, because His message was much larger than healed, physical bodies.

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And then, one more surprising thing in this text is to find out that...Jesus *left!*

He did this from time to time, and when He did, it was shocking to everyone around, even to His own family and to His disciples. He would arrive in a town or village or wherever, huge crowds would come, and then just when He really started to become noticed and popular in that place...when the crowds were at their largest it seems...Jesus says, “Hey...have to go! and then disappears...usually into the wilderness.

Those closest to Him said, and if they didn’t say it, they were thinking it, “Jesus, what are you doing? Why leave now? I thought you wanted people to pay attention to you, but just when they start paying attention, you take off by yourself!”

The way Jesus did things...so much of it seemed so surprising...even shocking to those around Him then...and maybe to us too.

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The Bible tells us about *several* different times Jesus went off by Himself, and verse 16 here says Jesus actually did that *many* times.

Why did He do it?

Different reasons.

Some had to do with preparation for the next chapter of His life; others were times of recovery from the previous chapter.<sup>1</sup>

Part of it was undoubtedly to be alone...to be away from other people.

About that, let me just say...with the technology we’ve grown used to, it’s nearly unfathomable to us to be truly apart from contact with others.

But you know, even if Jesus had the tech we have today, I’m confident He would have turned it off or left it behind in those times, because there are dynamics at work within us when we’re truly

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12-13; Mark 3:13; Matthew 14:23; Mark 6:46; Matthew 15:29;

alone that simply can't happen when we're engaged with others, whether in person or electronically.

One reason Jesus left, at times, was to get by Himself.

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At other times, Jesus went off by Himself to prepare for some major task, or before making an important decision.²

Many times He went off by Himself to pray.

And at least a couple times Jesus went off by Himself to work through distress or grief, like when He'd heard about the death of His cousin, John the Baptist.³

But you know...one element that is consistently present in each of these times that Jesus went off by Himself...is some sort of rest.

Jesus took time to rest.

Now some might say, "Well, praying is not rest. Sometimes praying is the hardest work we can do," and you are right to say that.

But the thing is...prayer...time spent seeking and listening to God always *leads* to rest. In fact, prayer leads to the deepest sort of rest; prayer leads to the calmness of soul that takes away the anxieties and tensions that the world inflicts upon us.

Praying may not be, technically, rest, but prayer leads to rest.

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All these times of Jesus' "away-ness" are, in one way or another, intended to be times of rest, and we know this, in part, because we know that Jesus took the Mosaic Law seriously. He came, remember, not to destroy the Law but to fulfill it, so certainly Jesus kept the Ten Commandments, including the Sabbath commandment – to keep the day holy by resting from work.

That was important to Jesus and, may I say, it ought to be important to we who follow Him.

Now...this gets a little hairy, doesn't it...talking about rest and Sabbath and the Lord's Day, especially in our day, since even much of the Church doesn't pay much attention to this whole idea.

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If you research Sabbath, you'll find several different lines of thought about it.

One group argues (correctly) that the true, Jewish Sabbath day is actually Saturday, and not Sunday, so...they conclude, all who argue for a Sunday Sabbath are wrong right from the beginning.

² Luke 6:12-13; Mark 1:12; Mark 14:32;

³ Matthew 14:1-13; Luke 22:39-44

Others say that, since there is no direct command in the New Testament to keep the Sabbath Day, that commandment is different from the rest of the Ten, and not binding on Christians.

Still others want to argue about what, exactly “rest” is.

“Work is restful for me,” some say, so what is work to some is rest to others.

I’ve also heard, “If Sabbath is about resting from anxiety, the best way for me to do that is to work, since if I don’t, I’ll be anxious about all the work I have to do.”

There are several others too, but personally, my conclusion to these sorts of arguments is that, while each has an element of truth to them, what they actually prove is that there is no end to the human capacity to create a case for simply doing what we want to do.

Humans have an amazing ability to manipulate facts to suit our preferences, and we need to keep that in mind when we encounter commands of God that we would rather not keep. We are very good at creating *license* to do as we please.

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Now, the flipside of *license*...is...*legalism*.

A couple Sunday nights ago, we talked about the Teachers of the Law (otherwise known as the Scribes) and the Pharisees of Jesus day, and how they had become true professionals at taking the broad principles of God’s Law and turning them into a million little, individual requirements...which became the focus of their world and their definition of holiness.

To the Scribes and Pharisees, keeping the law meant making sure to do every one of their little interpretive requirements.

And even though the Scribes were surprisingly lax about some of the actually Scriptural, Mosaic law, they were *intensely particular* regarding Sabbath.

In Exodus 20, the fourth commandment simply says, “***Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God.***”<sup>4</sup>

But in just one section of the Scribes’ commentary on that, there are 24 chapters of rules about Sabbath, which include:

- No one can carry a load heavier than a dried fig.
- Throwing an object into the air with one hand and catching it with the other is prohibited.
- If the Sabbath overtakes you as you reach for some food, the food must be dropped.
- No baths were allowed, since one might spill water on the floor and inadvertently wash it.
- Chairs cannot be moved since they might make a rut in the ground, which would be considered plowing.

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<sup>4</sup> Exodus 20:8-11

- Women cannot look in a mirror lest they be tempted to pluck a gray hair.
- If someone was sick on the Sabbath, only enough treatment could be given to keep the sick person alive.
- No sewing, plowing, reaping, grinding, baking, threshing, binding sheaves, winnowing, sifting, dying, shearing, spinning, kneading, separating or weaving two threads, tying or untying a knot, or sewing more than two stitches.
- One could only travel 3,000 feet from their home, but if, on the previous day, they had placed food within 3,000 feet of the home, they could go there to eat it...and since the food was an extension of the house, they could then go another 3,000 feet beyond the food.

These, and many more like them, are the **burdens**, Jesus said, that the Scribes and Pharisees piled upon the people, since this is what Sabbath had become to them – the mere keeping of all the tiny regulations that they and their ancestors had built around the commandment itself.

This is why Jesus' had so little patience with the Scribes and Pharisees...they had utterly lost the meaning, and the blessing, of Sabbath rest that God's Law, through Moses, originally intended.

Jesus summed it up well when He told the Pharisees, ***“The Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath.”***<sup>5</sup>

What's that mean? It means that God's command to take a regular, consistent time for rest and worship...it was all for our good, our health, our blessing.

Isaiah says that ***“Sabbath is a delight.”***<sup>6</sup>

Why?

Because God designed and intended it to help us keep a definite “opening in our schedules,” if you will, for a deep connection with Him, for a period of rest, and to help us keep a **sense** of **cadence** and order in what God **knew could** and surely **would** become a **chaotic** world.

It's like God saw, at creation, that here in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we'd be tempted, and we'd have the technology, to work all the time, to never have any concentrated time of quiet where He might speak, and to fill our lives with distractions and busy-ness so that every day is the same.

And God knows that's not healthy. God knows we need regularity, order, rest and quiet in our lives, and He knows the temptations of the world to disrupt those are pervasive and very intentional on the part of the enemy.

You see, Satan wants nothing more than to run us **away** from God and **into** the ground in exhaustion.

But God wants just the opposite for us...for everyone...He wants people to run to **Him** and to have **abundant life**, and the Sabbath commandment was His way of allowing for that.

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⁵ Mark 2:27

⁶ Isaiah 58:13

Now...how, precisely, to do it...how to practice the principle of Sabbath rest

Well, beyond the words of Exodus there and the examples we see in Jesus, we have to figure that out, and we need the Spirit's help and guidance to do that.

We have to avoid the Pharisaic legalism that Jesus rejected.

At the same time, we also have to embrace the fact that the "anything goes" mentality of *license* misses the mark just as badly.

We have an enemy who is constantly tempting us to just do as we please, but listening to Him will invariably lead us to destruction in one way or another.

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To live in obedience to God, yet also in freedom, is only possible by following the guidance of God's Spirit in accordance with what the Bible clearly tells us.

And Jesus set the pace for this. He knew the difference between God's Law and man's law or tradition or whatever you want to call it, and He walked that line easily because in His heart, He trusted that His Heavenly Father wanted the best for Him, and that God would never ask Him to do something that would not result in good.

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It's God's idea that we take regular, consistent times of worship and rest. It is a commandment, but it is also a healthy habit that God Himself instituted at creation, not to control or limit us, but to preserve us.

He's giving us, and telling us it's good if we take, a regular vacation. I mean, if we trust, like Jesus did, that God the Father is out for our good, then why would we resist Him on this?

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So what is, precisely, worship and rest?

There are many ideas about those things – there always have been.

The Scribes had their ideas.

The church, through the years, has had it's ideas.

Where are our ideas Biblical, where are they just products of tradition, and where are they just our own preferences...what we want to do?

I ran into this with my extended family – who were all part of the holiness church tradition – not exactly pharisaical, but certainly rules-oriented. I realize now that they were trying, best they could, to honor the principle of the commandment, and I trust they were trying to hear the Spirit.

I'd ask, why is it OK to take a walk but not a jog on Sunday?

Why can I drive my car but not vacuum it out?

Why can I play a board game but not basketball?

That sort of thing. I struggled with those rules, which seemed to have no foundation beyond, "You just can't."

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Of course, today, the vast majority of the Church is far too lax about the regular worship and rest that God intended for His people. We do as we please every hour of the day and every day of the week. We “catch worship online” when we have time – which is actually totally contrary to the true spirit of worship.

Technology allows for it, but surely this is at least partly why life is crazy busy, why our nation is in the spiritual condition it’s in, and why so much of the American Church lacks any real spiritual power.

And the ironic thing is...many think the answer is to work harder and longer, when instead, the answer is to take a cue from Jesus and to take all God’s commands, including the fourth commandment, seriously, and regain some order and power and rest in our lives.

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There’s no doubt that, in our society, the church needs to do that.

Do you, personally, need to do that?

Have you neglected or ignored God’s command, and Jesus’ example, of intentional times of worship and rest?

At least to some degree, that’s why we’re cranky, angry and exhausted, and it contributes in big ways to why our lives and schedules are chaotic.

We need cadence. We need order. We need to connect with God. We need rest.

God’s known all this since creation, and He gave us the principle...the command...one of His ten most important, to follow.

Jesus took it seriously.

Will you? Will you follow...not *license* and not *legalism*...but will you follow Jesus in this healthy habit of remembering to rest?

### **Closing Prayer:**

Father, You do things like this so, so often; from Eden, You’ve done this: You draw parameters...boundaries...and then say to us, “if you’ll stay within these bounds, you’ll live the best life you can live.”

And we push back and push back. Father, help us not to do that with Your call...your invitation...to set time apart for worship and rest.

Holy Spirit, convince us of how important obedience here is, and show us how this can look in our lives. Show us how we need to adjust ourselves so we might truly live in obedience to the Father...for our own good and for His glory.

### **Closing Song:**

### **Closing Word:**

I can't help but think of how Jesus would go to the synagogue as was His custom. He worshipped weekly. As all the people came around Him, His disciples probably pushed back on Him with "Why don't You do this ...?" "Why don't we do this ...?" Do ... do ... do.

He never struggled. He knew what was obedient to God the Father ... and He did it. And He was able to push aside all the voices around Him and say, "Well, this isn't how it works ... how the world works." It's far more how *their* world works than how *our* world works.

Any successful outward journey we take for the sake of ministry ... service ... evangelism ... witness ... providing for our family ... whatever it is ... any outward journey we take for the sake of Christ is powered by the inward journey of obedience which involves worship, rest, keeping a Godly cadence to our lives.

No matter what we do for Jesus, if we're not walking with Him...living in Him – it's not going to last.

May our inward and outward journeys come together here in an obedient way with regard to rest and to worship.

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