

June 24, 2007

“Daily Sabbaths” (based on *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, by Peter Scazzero)

1 Kings 19:11-12 NLT

"Go out and stand before me on the mountain," the LORD told him. And as Elijah stood there, the LORD passed by, and a mighty windstorm hit the mountain. It was such a terrible blast that the rocks were torn loose, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. 12 And after the earthquake there was a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire there was the sound of a gentle whisper.

Perhaps you have heard the joke about the guy caught in a flood...He's sitting on the roof of his house, with the water steadily rising; somebody comes by in a boat, and offers him a ride to safety. He says, "no, I have faith in God, He will save me." The water's up to his neck by the time a second boat comes by and offers help. Again, he refuses, saying that he has faith that God would save him. Eventually, he's treading water, and a helicopter shows up and tosses down a rope. Once again, he refuses. He has faith that God will save him.

Well, he drowns.

He got to heaven, and asked God: "I had faith in you, Lord. Why didn't You save me?"

God replied: "I sent you two boats and a helicopter, what more do you want?"

Sometimes we are caught up to our necks with the storms of life and we need a “rope” to be tossed down to us to save us from the overwhelming floods.

Last year we sent a group to Louisiana to help people whose homes were destroyed by the floods after hurricane Katrina. (This year we are going back to the Gulf Coast only this time to Mississippi, to re-build homes. You can help support that trip by giving a donation to the church, earmarked “Mississippi Mission Trip.”). From what I understand about Katrina in Louisiana is that the people actually survived the hurricane, but the next day the levees gave way and water came flooding in. One of the stories we heard last year was about a Nazarene church in one of the poorer areas of Louisiana. (We used that church as a center to hand out supplies to people in that poor community). This Nazarene church was having a prayer meeting when the flood waters came and when the waters came they came quickly. The church had a second floor and those praying went upstairs. The bottom floor was completely under water (8 to 10 feet of water), but the people were safe in the upper part of the church. They were up there for a few days. When the flood waters came a man in the neighborhood was forced to leave his home and swam to the church. The people pulled him into the church through an upstairs window. This man found sanctuary in that upper room. He was led to Christ by the people and is a part of that church today. He came to the right place that night in the midst of the storm. He was saved that night in more ways than one. Do you know where to go in the midst of the storms of life?

In his book *A Hidden Wholeness* Parker Palmer tells a story about farmers in the Midwest who have blizzards that come quickly and fiercely and are very dangerous. When they come a farmer literally cannot see the end of his or her own hand. Many farms are found frozen to death in these blizzards, disoriented by their inability to see. They wander in circles, lost in their own backyards. Some are found dead within feet of their own front door never realizing how close they were to safety. Therefore, they prepare for these blizzards in an unusual way. The farmers tie a rope from the back door of their house out to the barn to guide them safely home in the case of a sudden blizzard.

What about our lives? Between the demands of work, family, and just saying yes to too many things, our lives feel like we are in that blizzard...we can't see where we are going. Our lives are not only full, they're overflowing and it's overwhelming. We are over scheduled, tense, frantic and always in a hurry. We are preoccupied, fatigued and never seem to have enough time...to give to anything. And if we are not busy we feel guilty. Add to this the problems, and trials of life that come unexpectedly and it is no wonder that we are disoriented, confused, and overwhelmed. We need Someone to toss us a rope to lead us home.

God offers us a rope to keep us from getting lost. It is a rope that leads us back to Him. The rope is found in taking what I call "Daily Sabbaths." A Sabbath is a time of rest and worship. A Sabbath is not meant to add more to our already busy schedules. It is meant to refocus and reset our lives on a new destination – God. It is to be something we want to do, not have to do. Now, I am not talking about a daily quiet time which is usually spent in reading the Bible, and or a devotional book, prayer, and perhaps journaling. Which is a great way to start your day and worth making the time to do. But I am talking about a way to pay attention to God all through the day. A means of being in God's presence all day long. A way of slowing down our lives and feeling a rope, which is God Himself as an anchor no matter what storm/blizzard may come blowing into our lives. I am talking about taking time during your day – it might be 2 minutes, or 2 hours or anything in between – to pause to be with God ("Regular remembrances of God").

The central elements of these Daily Sabbaths are:

1. Stop

Stop all other activity and pause to be with the living God. The heart of these daily times (of pausing to be with God) is stopping to surrender to God in trust. Trust that you can stop all your activity to be with God because He is in control and can run the world without you. Things will not fall apart because you have stopped your activities. You can even stop to pause for a moment, to bring your attention to God Who is always there.

2. Center

The Bible commands us to, "Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for Him" (Ps 37:7 NIV); "Be still (silent), and know that I am God! (Ps 46:10 NIV). Stop, move into God's presence, centering on Him and rest there. By centering I mean let go of the distractions, and tensions and begin resting in the love of God. James Finley gives these guidelines: sit still, sit straight, breathe slowly, deeply, and naturally, close your eyes, be

attentive and open. Others suggest that if your mind wanders breath in and ask God to fill you with the Holy Spirit. As you exhale, breath out sin and all that is false and not of God. This practice, of being absent from people and things, is to be attentive to God. This is a time to turn to God, not to get something, but to be *with* Someone (God). This is a time to quiet every inner and outer voice to attend to God. Be attentive to God. If something can help you do that - use it (Bible, worship music, devotional book etc.)

3. Silence

Our world is so noisy and distracting and we have gotten so use to having noise, that we fear silence. Studies show that the average person can only take about 15 seconds of silence. You must break that habit.

In our text for today, when God spoke to Elijah it was after his suicidal depression and running for his life from Jezebel. God tells Elijah to stand and wait for the presence of the Lord. God came to Elijah not in way that He had in the past. God was not in the mighty windstorm (which, by the way is how God came to Job. God can come to us in a storm, but He did not come to Elijah that way.); God did not come to Elijah in an earthquake (as on Mount Sinai when He gave the 10 Commandments); nor did God come in the fire (as when He came to Moses in the burning bush). God can come to us in the storm, earthquake or fire, but God revealed Himself to Elijah in “the sound of a gentle whisper.” He came to Elijah in the silence. If we will come out of the chaos to be silent we will find that quiet place is full of the presence of God. God spoke to Elijah out of the silence.

I want to share with you a different rope illustration that I heard this week. It’s a story of a mountain climber who wanted to climb the highest mountain. He would be famous, he was doing it for his own glory. He decided to climb the mountain alone. By night he was at the heights of the mountain. It was completely black. Zero visibility. There wasn’t even any light from the moon or the stars which were covered by clouds. When he was just a few feet from the top of the mountain, he slipped and began to fall at great speed. As he continue to fall the good and bad moments of his life flash before him. He was thinking about how close he was to death when suddenly he felt the rope that was around his waist pull him hard. His body was hang in mid-air. Only the rope was holding him. And in that moment he called/screamed out, “Help me, God!” Then he heard a voice say, “What do you want me to do?” “Save me” the man cried. Then the voice said, “Do you really believe that I can save you?” “Of course I believe you can.” Said the mountain climber. “Then cut the rope tied to your waist.” There was a moment of silence, then the man decided to hold on to the rope with all his strength. The rescue team found him the next day frozen to death as he still hung from the rope...his hands still holding tightly to it... ONLY 10 FEET FROM THE GROUND!

You see when we are in trouble we grasp at many ropes. How attached are you to your “rope?” Daily Sabbaths allow us to let go to trust God. The heart of these Daily Sabbaths is to surrender to God in trust. Your purpose during these Daily Sabbaths is to be with God so that you will remember God all through your day. These Daily Sabbaths

are away of taking hold of the rope *God* is throwing you to save you from the blizzard of activity that threatens your life. Don't refuse it.