

Green Pastures – Still Waters

Sterling UMC
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Psalm 23:2

Today we're continuing in our series through Psalm 23, entitled The Lord is My Shepherd. Over the next several weeks we're going to look at seven of the most difficult issues that plague us. Last week we looked at worry. This morning we are going to look at another issue that is almost epidemic in our society, busyness.

"Busy" is the hallmark of our times. If you meet someone at the grocery store or run into them at McDonald's, and you ask them "How are you doing?" more commonly than not, the answer is "Busy". It has become somewhat of a 'badge of honor' to wear, it seems. We almost feel obligated to stay busy, don't we?

Is that you? How many consider yourselves to be too busy? How do you know if you're too busy?

- No matter what you're doing, you have a vague sense you ought to be doing something else.
- No matter how hard you work, you always feel like you're behind.
- You feel like your spinning your wheels -- you get to the end of the week, and in spite of all your activity, you find yourself asking, "what have I really accomplished?"

If it is don't feel too bad. Our culture is infected with what one author has called "hurry sickness." It is the tendency to do too many things at once. If you found yourself in any of those descriptions you have some form of hurry sickness. And as we all know, the consequences aren't pretty.

Living busy lives is costing us. We're stressed and rushed even when we don't need to be. It feels like we're stuck on a hamster wheel, and we wish we could get off. Some of us take a vacation and end up getting sick because we're exhausted. We're less satisfied, but we can't see how things are going to change.

This is not the kind of life God wants you to live. Psalm 127:2 (LB), "It is senseless for you to work so hard from early morning until late at night... God wants his loved ones to get their proper rest." If you're burning the candle at both ends, you're not as bright as you think you are. So how do we find the help we need. We find it in the care of our Good Shepherd.

Psalm 23:2 (RSV), "He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside still waters." Green pastures – still waters. Doesn't that sound refreshing? If you were a sheep you would understand this because this is a perfect picture of paradise. He's referring to rest and refreshment. God is interested in your rest and recreation. He wants you to live a whole, balanced and complete life. He wants to provide you and me a means by which our souls can catch up with our bodies.

So this morning I want to share with you a prescription for busy people. God's way for us to find those green pastures and still waters in the midst of a turbulent lifestyle that can leave our spirit as barren and dry as a desert. The prescription is an acrostic I learned from the writing of Rick Warren, the writer of the Purpose Driven Life. That prescription is this – RELAX.

REALIZE MY WORTH

The reason most people overwork is because they confuse their work and their worth. We think that if we work a whole lot, achieve a lot, we're worth a lot. We confuse what we do with who we are. In America, we get our primary identity from what we do. When we meet someone, after we find out their name, usually the second question is "What do you do?" We get our worth, we think, from our work.

The Bible doesn't teach that. Listen to what God says about you. James 1:18 (NCV), "God decided to give us life through the word of truth so we might be the most important of all the things he made." God says you matter more than the rest of creation. You can relax; you don't have to prove your worth. But you do need to realize how valuable you are to God.

Jesus said in Matthew 6:26 (LB) "... your heavenly Father feeds the (sparrows). And you are far more valuable to him than they are." If God notices even when a bird falls to the ground and takes care of birds, don't you think He takes care of you?

You don't have to prove your worth by overworking.

ENJOY WHAT I ALREADY HAVE

Ecclesiastes 3:13 (GN), "All of us should... enjoy what we have worked for. It is God's gift." Can you be so preoccupied in getting more that you don't enjoy what you've got? Sure. Can you so busy trying, with the desire to acquire more and more that you don't enjoy what's already in your garage? We have beautiful homes but nobody enjoys them because nobody is at home. We're always working, always on the road.

We get into a syndrome: The desire to acquire. We're trying to keep up with the Jones's. We try to get more and more and we exhaust ourselves in the process. That's not the way God wants us to live.

Ecclesiastes 4:6 (GN) says, "It's better to have only a little, with peace of mind, than be busy all the time..." The greatest things in life aren't things. As a pastor I've been at a lot of death beds. I have never had one person say at their final breath, "I wish I had spent more time at the office." Many have said "I wish I had spent more time with my kids (wife, husband, building relationships, with God)". We get all of these things but you're not going to take them with you. You don't ever see a hearse pulling a U-haul.

Enjoy what you have while you've got it and don't kill yourself worrying about getting more all of the time.

LIMIT MY LABOR

I must make a conscious decision to make time for other things besides work. I have to decide how many hours I realistically want to spend working each week and then I need to stick to it. I need to schedule time for myself, with God alone, with my family -- those are important elements in my life as well as work.

Two words are important in this area: Balance and margin. Balance is so important in every area of our lives. When we allow things to get out of balance we run the risk of allowing life to get into an unhealthy pattern that can be very destructive.

We also need margin. Margin is the space between our load and our limit. The goal is to build some margin into our lives so we will have time and energy for the things that really matter. Margin is not laziness; it's wisdom. It is planning for the unexpected and guarding what truly matters.

Jesus understood this. He found a way to establish balance and margin. He frequently stopped to rest. Several times He took a boat across the Sea of Galilee so the group could have some quiet time. Jesus often found time to be alone with God. Even God took the seventh day (the Sabbath) to rest and enjoy His creation.

Our creator God built this into the very fabric of creation. Exodus 20:9-10 (GN), "You have six days in which to do your work, but the 7th day is to be a day of rest dedicated to Me." God says that one day off every week is the rule. This is the fourth commandment. God says do it.

Why? The Bible calls it the Sabbath. Sabbath means a day of rest. In Mark 2:27 (GN), Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for the good of human beings." Colossians says it doesn't matter what day you choose as long as you choose one every week. Sunday is not my Sabbath, it's a work day.

Do you feel guilty when you relax? Jesus didn't. He took time off. Are you busier than Jesus? Is what you're doing more important than what Jesus did?

ADJUST MY VALUES

In order to reduce busyness in my life I must change my thinking about what is important. Ecclesiastes 4:4 (GN) says, "I've learned why people work so hard to succeed; it is because they envy the things their neighbors have." You have to stop and say you're not going to get caught up in the rat race of always getting more. There are some things more important than getting more.

Mark 8:36 (NIV), "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?" Is it worth it? Ask yourself this question about every area in your life. You may be making great money right now, but at what cost? You may be successful in business,

but are the kids getting any parenting? They're going to be gone in a few more years. Will I regret that? No matter how much you make you can lose it all anyway.

EXCHANGE MY PRESSURE FOR GOD'S PEACE

This gets at the very root of the problem. There are three kinds of fatigue:

There is physical fatigue -- tired muscles. That can be replenished pretty quickly.

There is emotional fatigue -- tired emotions, feelings.

There is spiritual fatigue -- a dry spirit. This is the deepest.

You may need a vacation. But a vacation will not help these last two. You need more than just time off to recharge your emotions and focus your spirit. You need a relationship with God. You can take a two week vacation in Hawaii but when you come back you're still going to have the same problems. The pressures are still going to be there. It means more than just taking time off; it means readjusting my values and exchanging my pressure for God's peace.

A little child does not like to lie down, to rest. Resistance to rest is a mark of immaturity. If you're always working and never taking any time to rest it not only says you're breaking the Ten Commandments but it says you're immature. Sheep don't like to rest, to lie down. In Psalm 23:2 "He makes me lie down." That's a forcing.

Has God ever had to make you lie down? If you don't slow down, sometimes God will just make you lie down.

He cares about you. You matter to Him.

Bottom line: You need a relationship with Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, who will help you set the pace of your life.

Paraphrase of Psalm 23:

The Lord is my pacesetter, I shall not rush. He makes me stop and rest at intervals. He provides me with images of stillness to restore my serenity. He leads me in the way of efficiency to calmness of mind and this guidance is peace. Even though I have a great many things to accomplish this day, I will not fret for His presence is here. His timeliness, His all importance will keep me in balance. He prepares refreshment and renewal in the midst of my activity, anointing my head with the oils of tranquility. My cup of joyous energy overflows. Surely harmony and effectiveness shall be the fruits of my hours, for I shall walk in the pace of my Lord and dwell in His heaven forever.

You need a pacesetter to set the pace of your life so you don't go too slow or too fast. The only person wise enough to do that who knows you inside and out better than you even know yourself is Jesus Christ. You need a relationship with Him where you exchange your pressure for His peace. When you live for God, it's not only the right way, it's the healthy way, the whole way, the balanced way, and the most relaxing way.

Green pastures – still waters. Jesus says, "Come to me, all of you who are tired and have heavy loads, and I will give you rest... the load I give you to carry is light." Matthew 11:28-29 (NCV). Are you stressed out, tired, weary? Jesus says come to Me.

Message paraphrase:

Are you tired? Are you worn out? Are you burned out on religion? Come to Me. Get away with Me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with Me and work with Me. Watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill fitting on your. Keep company with Me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.