

# The Way of Worship

Week 4

THAT WAY

THIS WAY

ANOTHER WAY

## The Sacred Pause

The first house that Esther and I bought was condemnable when we bought it. I had saved up a little money working 20 hours days cleaning up damage from the flood of '93 and we found a house that had been a rental and the owner had gotten behind on the taxes. If we could pay the back taxes, the owner would basically allow us to take over the loan. We assumed the loan with \$35k left to pay. The money I had saved up was just enough to pay the back taxes and the deal was done.

Among the million things wrong with this house, there was one issue that almost cost me my marriage. The house was infested with mice. Esther's allergic to cats and we had a huge field behind our house and every single house around us had cats so our house was the Mouse Party House. Esther wasn't too happy with this situation but it definitely reached a fever pitch one afternoon when Esther was getting something out of the top of our bedroom closet and a mouse jumped out of the top of the closet onto the top of Esther's head. The mouse ran down Esther's hair until it felt comfortable jumping to the floor.

I'm at work when this happens and get a phone call. Actually back then I believe it would have been a page. So I get the page, I find a pay phone and I call home to hear this...

"If you don't find a way to get rid of these mice, don't even bother coming home!"

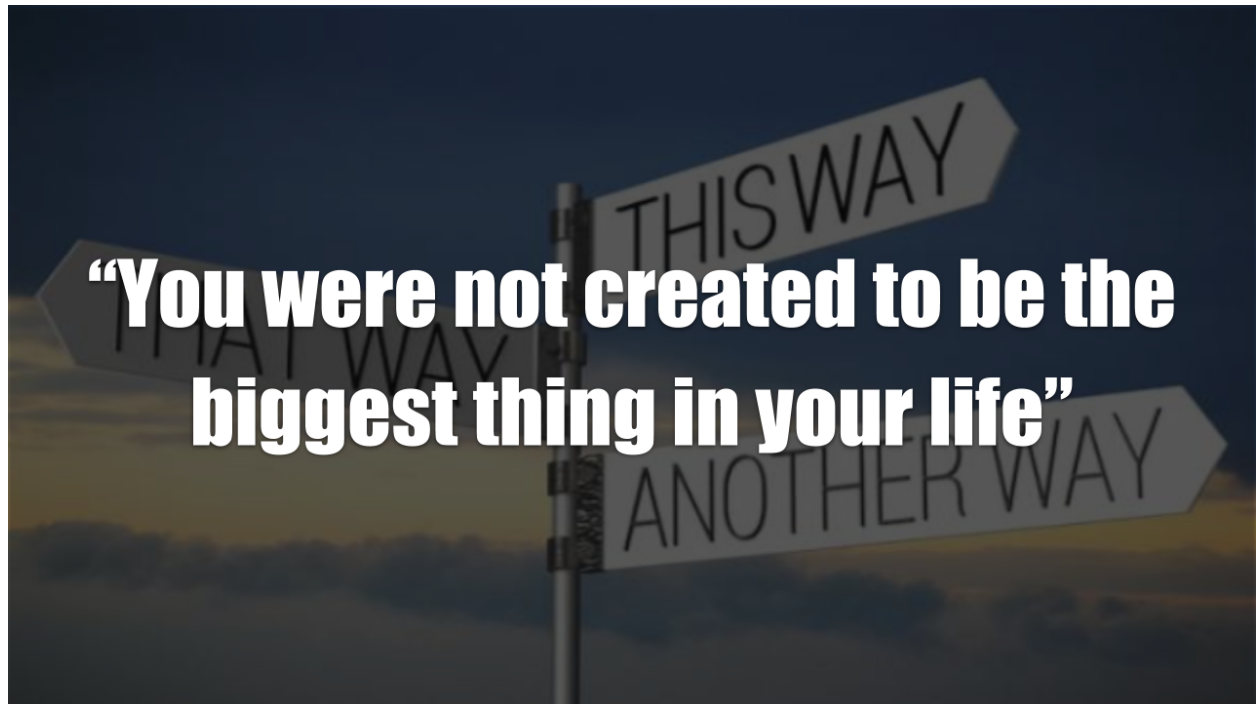
Well, we did wind up majorly improving our mouse situation, but as it turns out, we moved from our KCK house which backed up to a big empty field into our Gardner house which sat alongside a big empty field then to our current house which is basically in the middle of a big field. Esther and half my kids are still allergic to cats so long story short, Esther decided to let me stay even though I've never been able to entirely get rid of all the mice.

The one area that has probably been most affected by living in a mouse commune is the fact that my wife can no longer sleep in silence. When Esther and I first got married, she had to have absolute silence in order to sleep well. This was a little bit of an issue because she fell asleep at 9:00 in the evening and I almost never went to bed before 1:00, but as long as I wouldn't fall asleep with the TV on, she was ok.

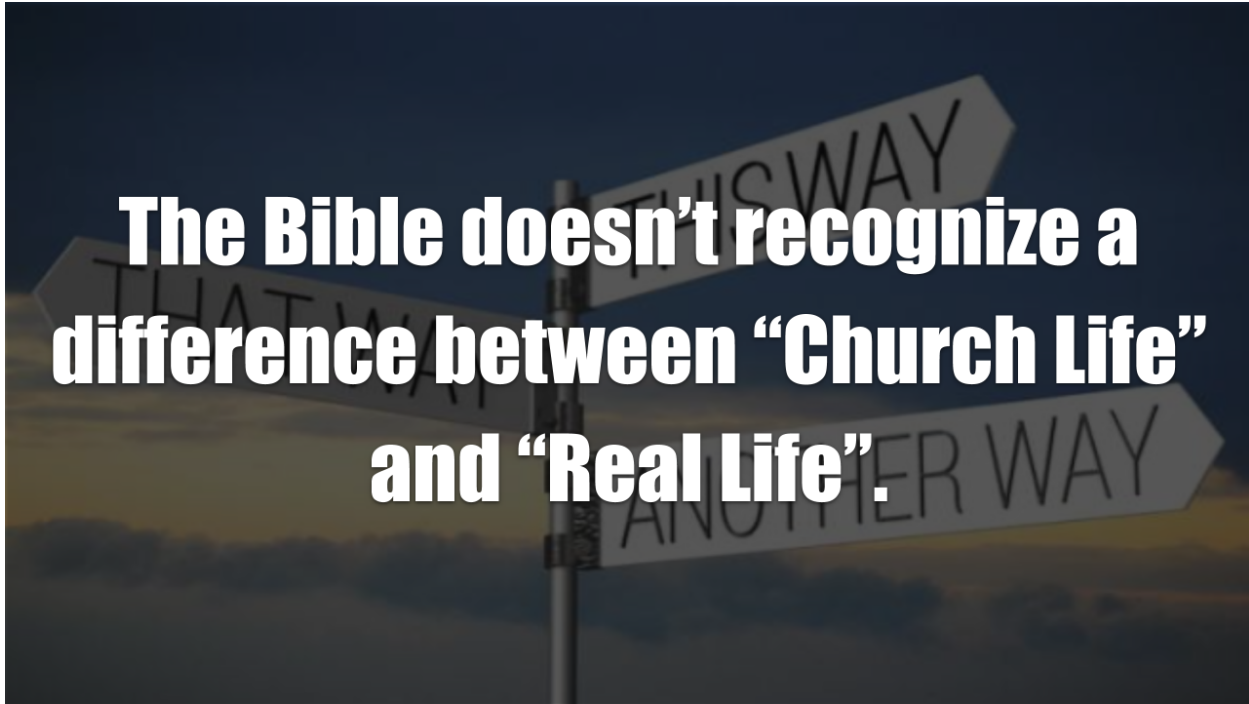
Well, I imagine that Esther would still prefer to sleep in silence except that when it's completely quiet, Esther's hearing is so good that she can hear mice scurrying in the attic or sometimes scratching and digging somewhere in the house. So now, Esther is the one who needs the television on to sleep just as cover noise to the sound of her roommates.

This story came to my mind this week because I've been thinking a lot about silence. This morning we're going to be talking about Contemplative Worship, more specifically, the spiritual disciplines of silence, solitude, and stillness. These are incredibly ancient practices within the Christian faith that for many years fell out of favor in Western life because they are very counter cultural and can even be viewed as subversive.

This is our fourth and final week in our series, The Way of Worship. We started by talking about how we're wired for worship. We are designed to draw to something bigger than ourselves. We said it this way...



Then we talked about Real World worship. We talked about how to an Old Testament Jew, there was no difference between the scriptures that told you how to offer sacrifices in worship and the scriptures that told you how to use fair business practices. We said it this way...



**The Bible doesn't recognize a difference between "Church Life" and "Real Life".**

Then last week we talked about why we Worship Together. We mostly talked about how the virtues within Christianity are corporate virtues. We need each other to not only practice being a Christian but to even learn what that means. We said it like this...



**You can **NOT** truly be a Christian alone**



This includes our worship. As we worship together, we are shaped by that activity into the people of God.

Well this morning as I wrap up this series, I feel that I have to start this sermon with the statement, “Hi, My name’s Chris and I’m a hypocrite”. The tough thing about preaching the Bible is that I continually have no choice but to tell you to do things that I don’t even do. But if I only preached the stuff that I’ve mastered, not only would I run out of content very quickly, but the best you could hope for is to maybe turn out to be like me and that’s not a worthy goal at all. Our hopes are to corporately grow more like Jesus which means me having to preach stuff that I’m not at all good at myself. Today is definitely one of those days.

### Silence, Solitude, and Stillness

These three disciplines make up the core of what is often called Contemplative Christianity, or the Contemplative Disciplines and they work together because if you don’t try to implement all three, human nature will find loopholes that will convince you that you’re being contemplative when you really aren’t.

For instance, if you stress Silence and Solitude but not stillness, you might go for a long run and tell yourself that you’re being contemplative.

Or, if you focus on stillness and solitude, you might just be watching TV alone.

Stillness and Silence when you’re not alone can just be what happens when your kids have made so much noise for so long that you’ve blown your top and screamed, “I don’t want to hear another word!!!!!!” And that’s not contemplative at all...

So here's what I'd like to do this morning...

I want to look at some scriptures that talk about these contemplative disciplines, and maybe see how serious the Bible is about these practices, then I want to look at the lies that keep us from obeying those passages, and maybe finish up by talking about how these disciplines can combat those lies.

So let's start way back with Moses... and I'm just going to take a small sampling from all over the scripture but this isn't even close to an exhaustive look at what the Bible has to say about these practices.

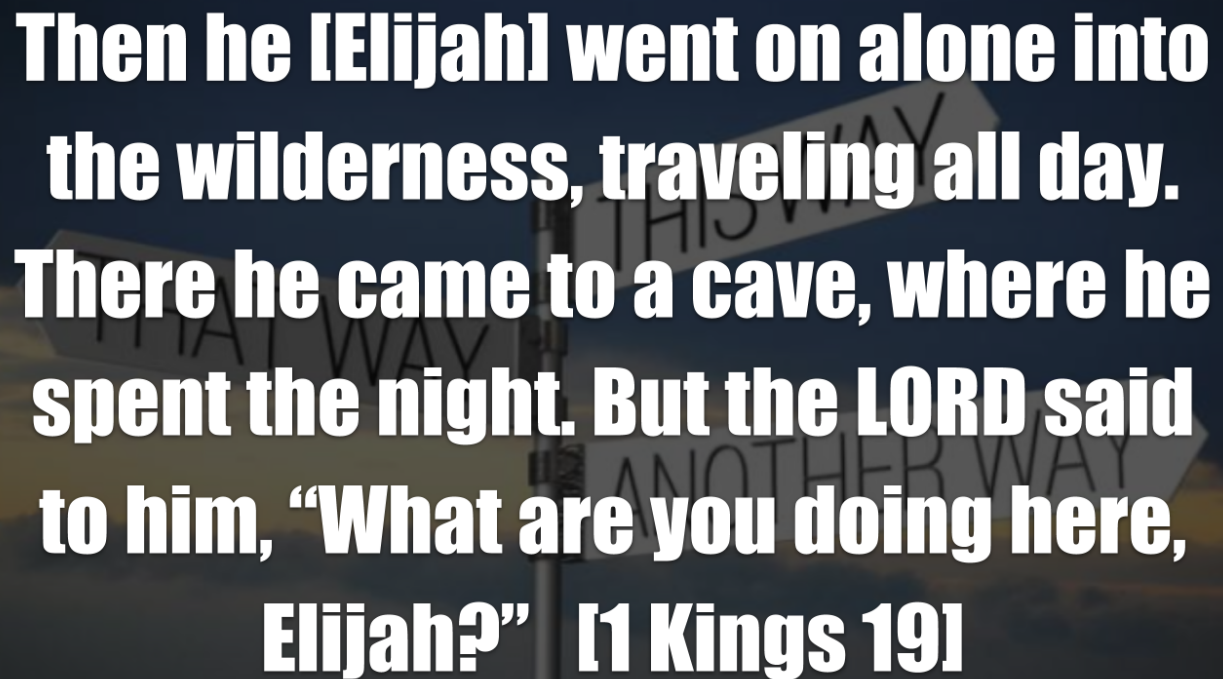
**It was Moses' practice to take the Tent of Meeting and set it up some distance from the camp. Everyone who wanted to make a request of the LORD would go to the Tent of Meeting outside the camp.**

**Whenever Moses went out to the Tent of Meeting, all the people would get up and stand in the entrances of their own tents. They would all watch Moses until he disappeared inside. (Ex 33:7-8)**

I love that phrase, “until he disappeared inside...” As we talk about getting alone with God, isn't that the dream? To disappear inside? But the scripture makes it very clear that when Moses spent time with God, and if you read the rest of Exodus 33, the passage says that Moses spoke with

God face to face as a friend, but when Moses did this, he had to separate himself and go to a place of solitude. Everyone else worshipped in their tents, but Moses knew that he needed more distance. Moses needed solitude.

This was the length to which the prophet Elijah went to be alone with God...

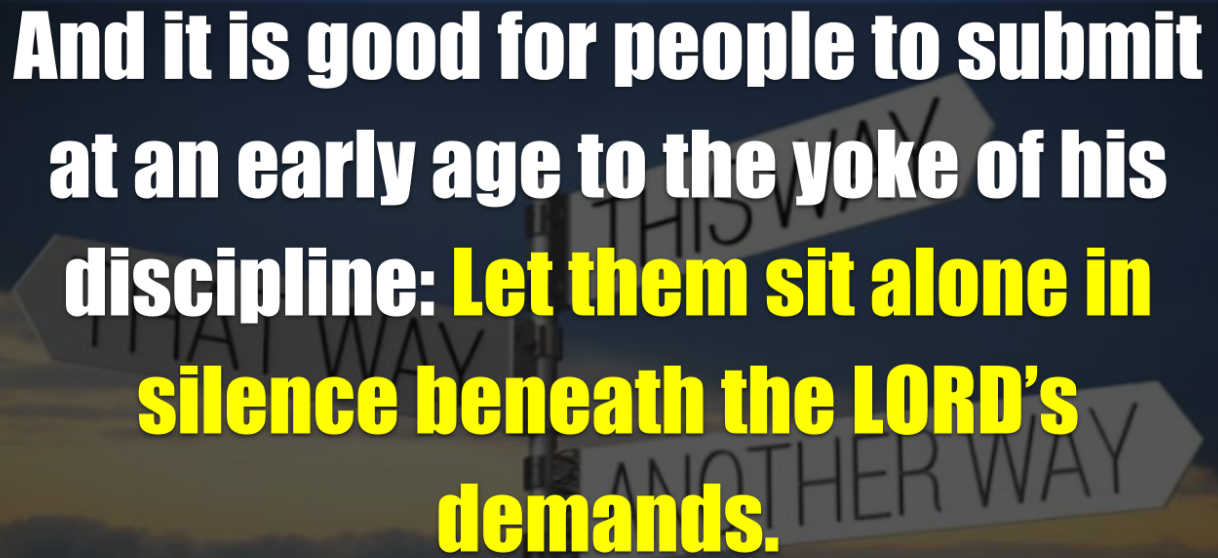


**Then he [Elijah] went on alone into the wilderness, traveling all day. There he came to a cave, where he spent the night. But the LORD said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” [1 Kings 19]**

Jeremiah who was generally plenty wordy, he wrote two long books of the Old Testament, suggested we relate to God like this...

**Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this: The faithful love of the LORD never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning.**

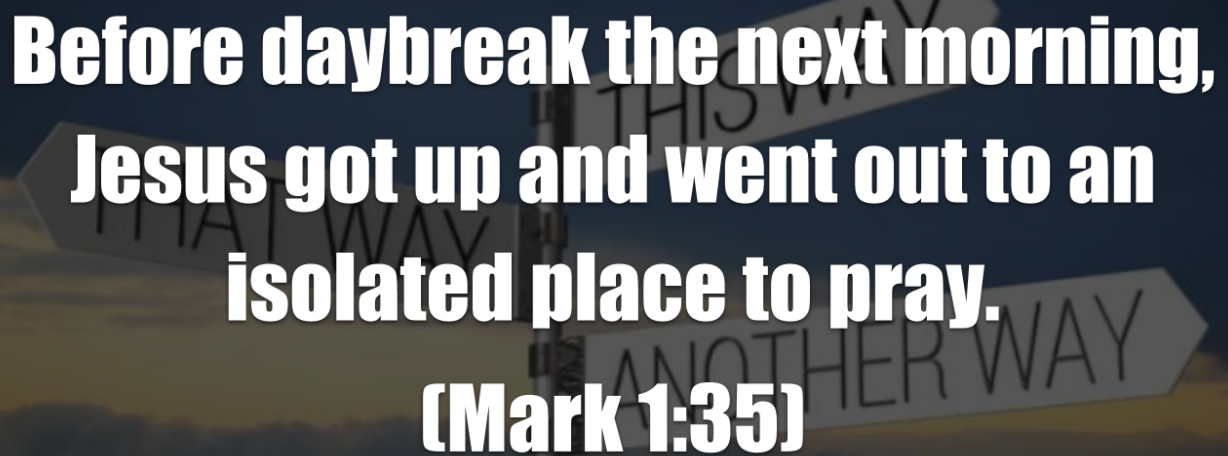
**I say to myself, "The LORD is my inheritance; therefore, I will hope in him!" The LORD is good to those who depend on him, to those who search for him. So it is good to wait quietly for salvation from the LORD.**

A dark, atmospheric background featuring a road signpost with several directional signs. The signs are partially obscured by the text. The text is centered and reads: "And it is good for people to submit at an early age to the yoke of his discipline: **Let them sit alone in silence beneath the LORD's demands.**"

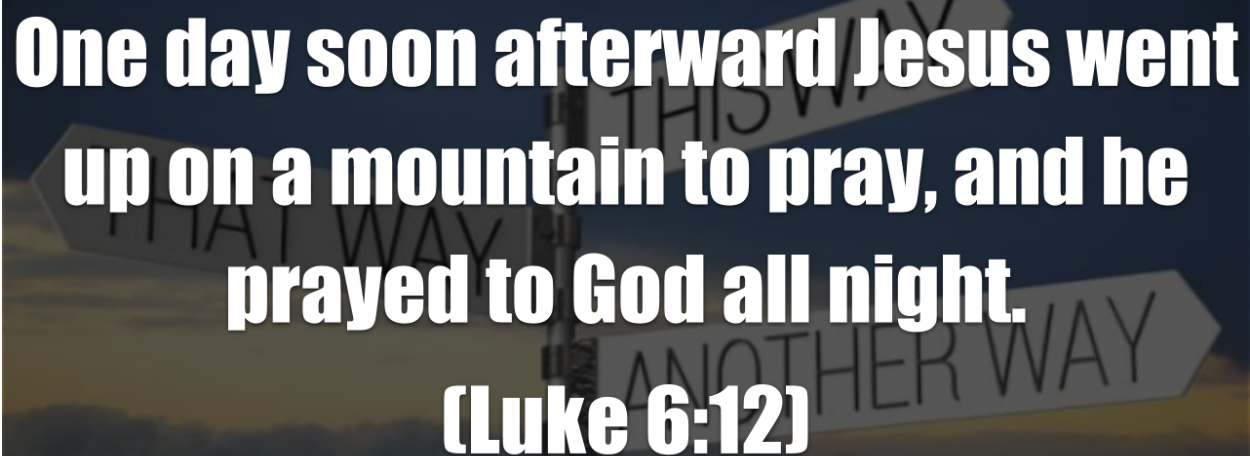
**And it is good for people to submit  
at an early age to the yoke of his  
discipline: **Let them sit alone in  
silence beneath the LORD's  
demands.****

**(Lamentations 3:21-28)**

But our clearest example of this type of discipline comes from Jesus Himself...

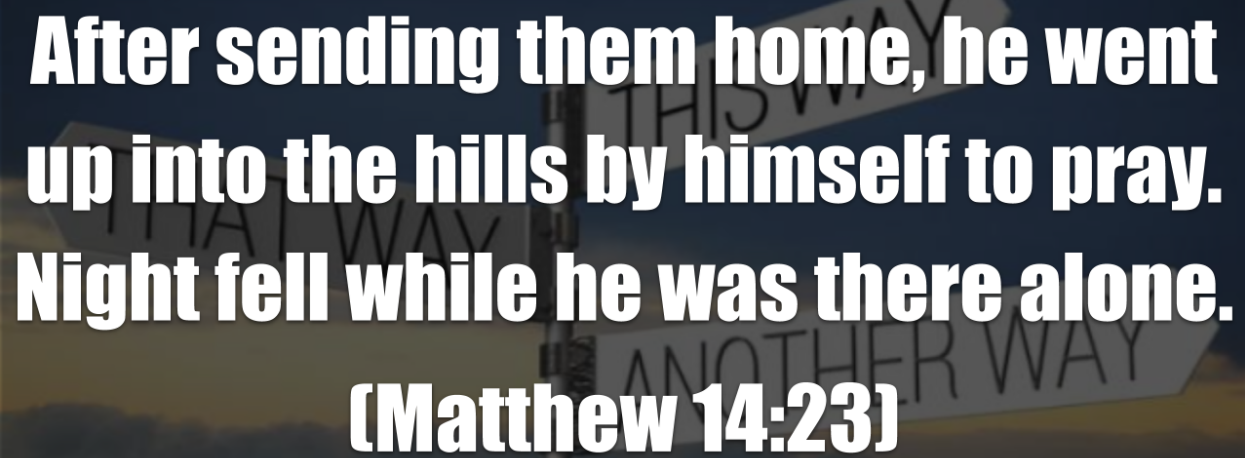


**Before daybreak the next morning,  
Jesus got up and went out to an  
isolated place to pray.  
(Mark 1:35)**



**One day soon afterward Jesus went  
up on a mountain to pray, and he  
prayed to God all night.  
(Luke 6:12)**



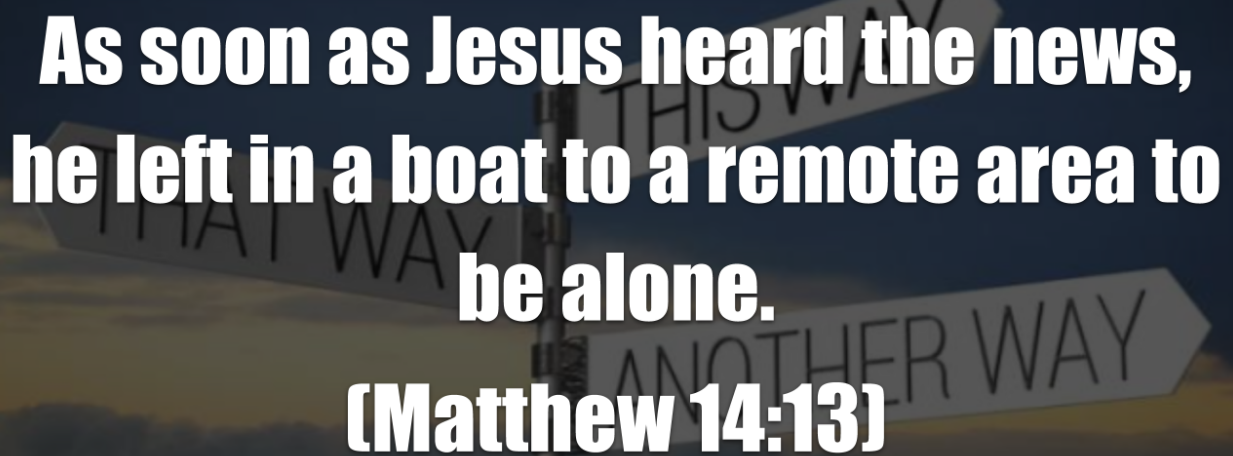


**After sending them home, he went up into the hills by himself to pray. Night fell while he was there alone. (Matthew 14:23)**

Anyone ever had one of those guests? Where when they finally leave you feel like you need some time in the mountains to recharge?

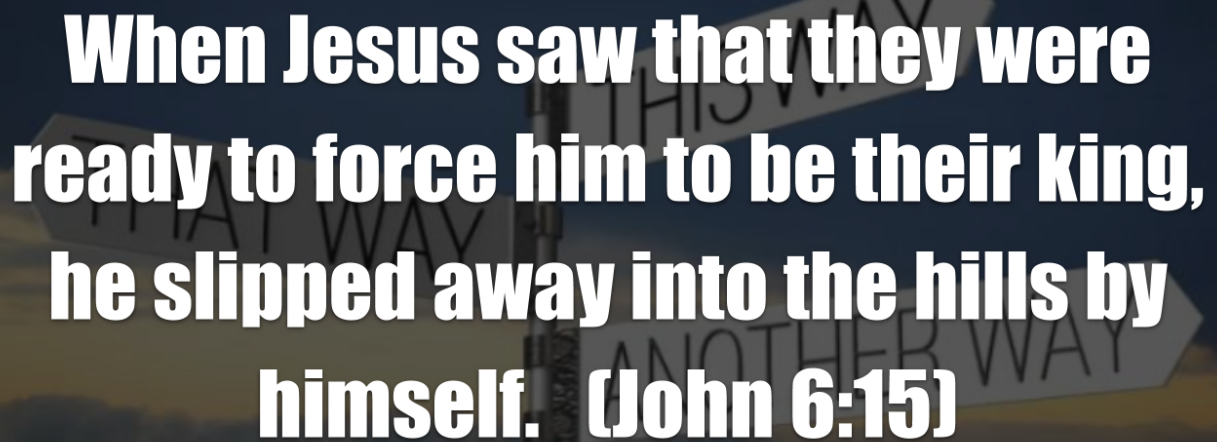
That's only a few of the many verses about Jesus leaving the crowds, leaving ministry, ignoring the urgency, to get alone with His Father.

It's also how Jesus handled bad news. When Jesus heard that John the Baptizer had been killed in prison, the Bible says this...



**As soon as Jesus heard the news,  
he left in a boat to a remote area to  
be alone.  
(Matthew 14:13)**

It's also how Jesus dealt with pressure...



**When Jesus saw that they were  
ready to force him to be their king,  
he slipped away into the hills by  
himself. (John 6:15)**

This is what I do every time people try to make me king... it's such a hassle...

You might be tempted to read these passages and just think, well that was Jesus. Of course he spent time alone with God, He's God's son. All true but we also know that Jesus tried to engage his disciples in this type of rhythm. Over and over we read about Jesus leading them to a quiet place, or taking Peter, James and John up onto the Mount of Transfiguration, or taking them into the Garden to pray.

One of my favorites is in Mark. Jesus had just sent them out to do ministry on their own for the first time. If you read this account in another gospel, you learn that they were crazy excited at how much power they had. If ever there was a high point in the momentum of Jesus' ministry, it was right here. And look what Jesus did...

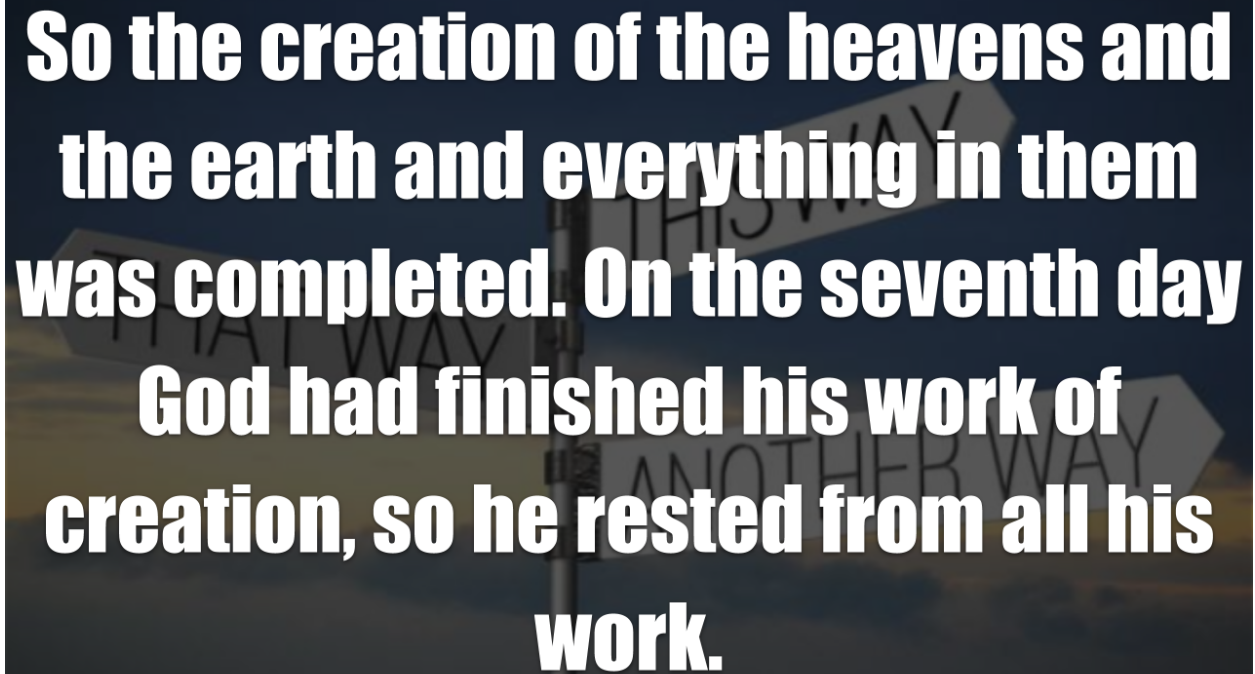
**The apostles returned to Jesus from their ministry tour and told him all they had done and taught. Then Jesus said, “Let’s go off by ourselves to a quiet place and rest awhile.”**

**He said this because there were so many people coming and going that Jesus and his apostles didn’t even have time to eat. So they left by boat for a quiet place, where they could be alone. (Mk 6:30-32)**

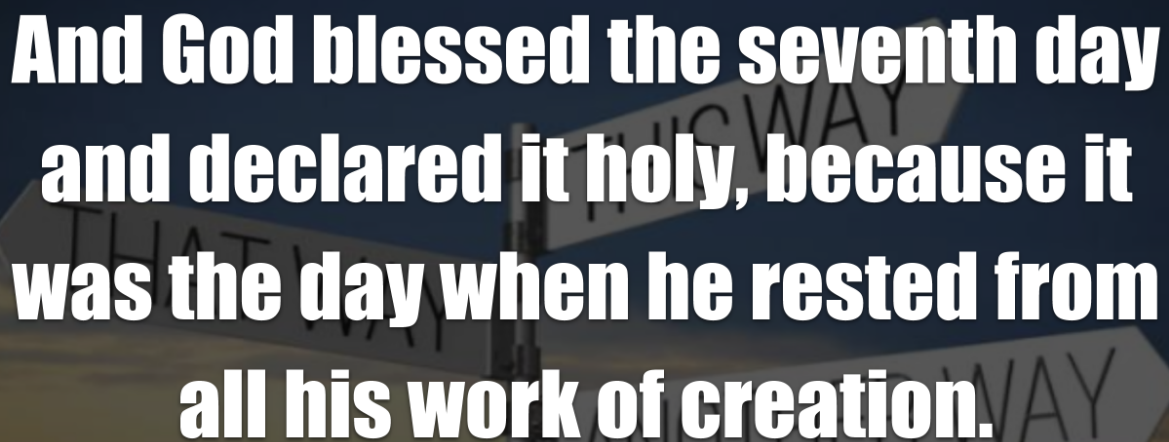
Be honest now, how many of you when you try to imagine taking a break right when everything is finally starting to flow, feel like that’s completely backward?

Jesus was committed to this lifestyle and I would argue that whether you're a Christian or not, you'd have to admit that there has never been another human who has ever been more effective at changing the world in a short period of time. And in the midst of all that productivity, Jesus was practicing Silence, Solitude and Stillness. Just wasting time.

I'm sure you've already noticed that this kind of wasteful rhythm goes all the way back to the beginning. We call it Sabbath. Back when the entire earth still had that New Earth Smell, when everything was brand new, the Bible said this...

The background of the text is a dark, slightly blurred image of a road signpost. The signpost has several directional signs pointing in different directions. The signs are white with black text and are arranged in a circular pattern around a central pole. The text on the signs is partially obscured by the main text overlay but includes phrases like "THIS WAY", "THAT WAY", and "ANOTHER WAY".

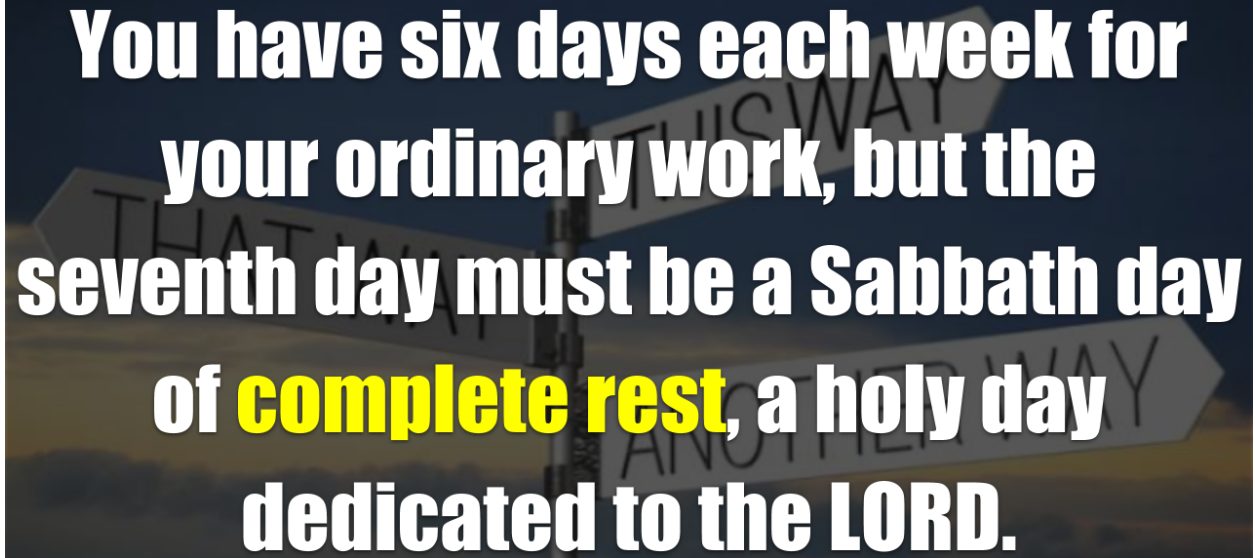
**So the creation of the heavens and the earth and everything in them was completed. On the seventh day God had finished his work of creation, so he rested from all his work.**

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**And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because it was the day when he rested from all his work of creation.**

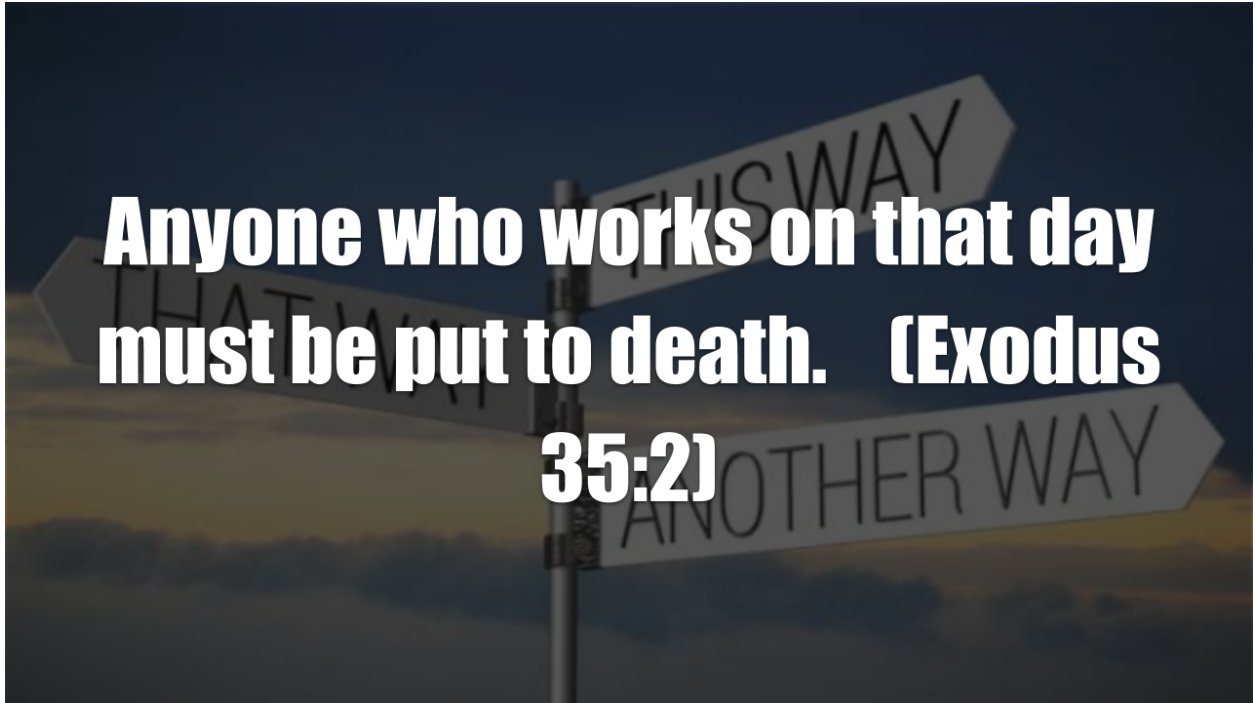
**(Genesis 2:1-3)**

Obviously God sets the example but He also commands this type of waste...



**You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day must be a Sabbath day of **complete rest**, a holy day dedicated to the LORD.**

And if you think this was just a suggestion, let me read the very next words...

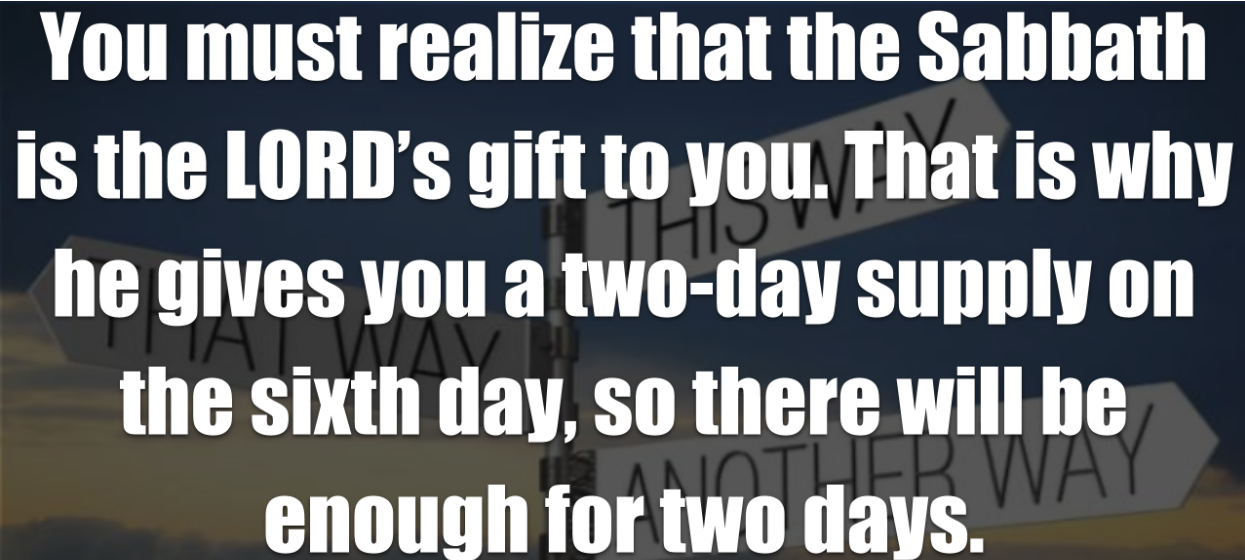


**Anyone who works on that day must be put to death. (Exodus 35:2)**

Raise your hand if you're thankful for Grace????



But here's what I love most about what the Bible says about Sabbath, this is incredibly insightful into human psychology.

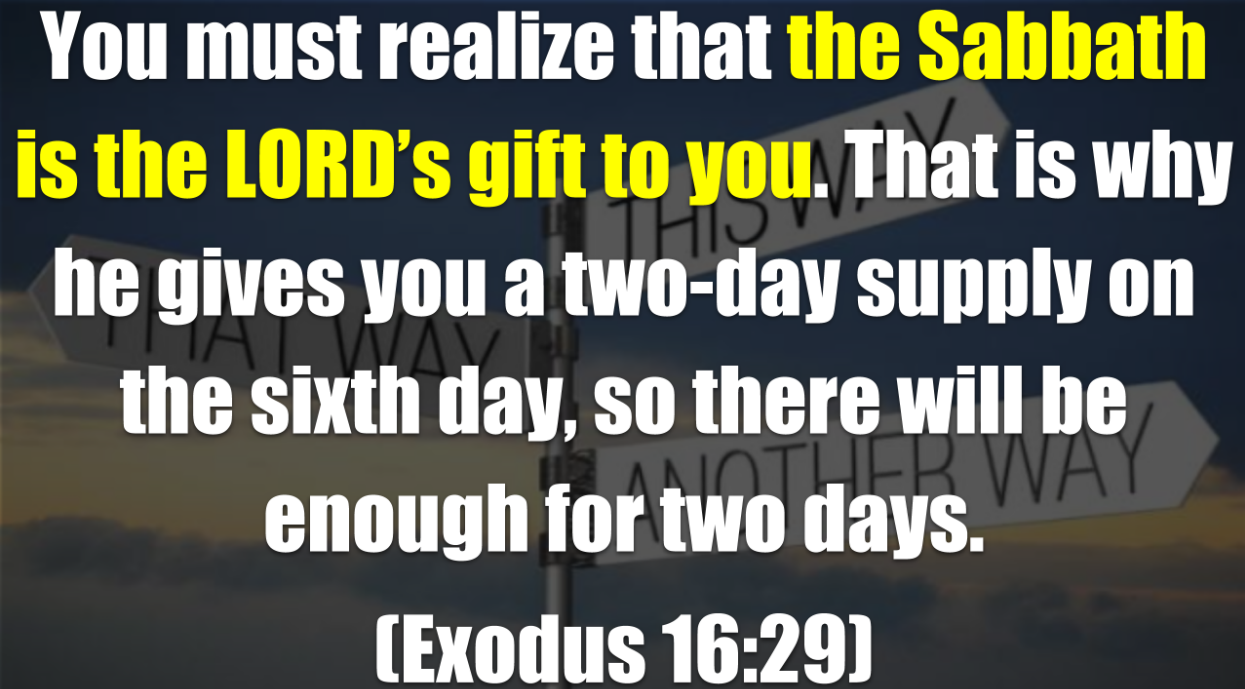


**You must realize that the Sabbath is the LORD's gift to you. That is why he gives you a two-day supply on the sixth day, so there will be enough for two days.**

**(Exodus 16:29)**

So this is when the Israelites were living on Manna in the wilderness. They just went outside their houses and picked their food up off the ground. No breaking soil, no planting, no weeding, no watering, no fertilizing, no harvesting. They just picked it up. But even that was more than God wanted them to do on their day of rest.

But the part I really want to draw to your attention is that opening...

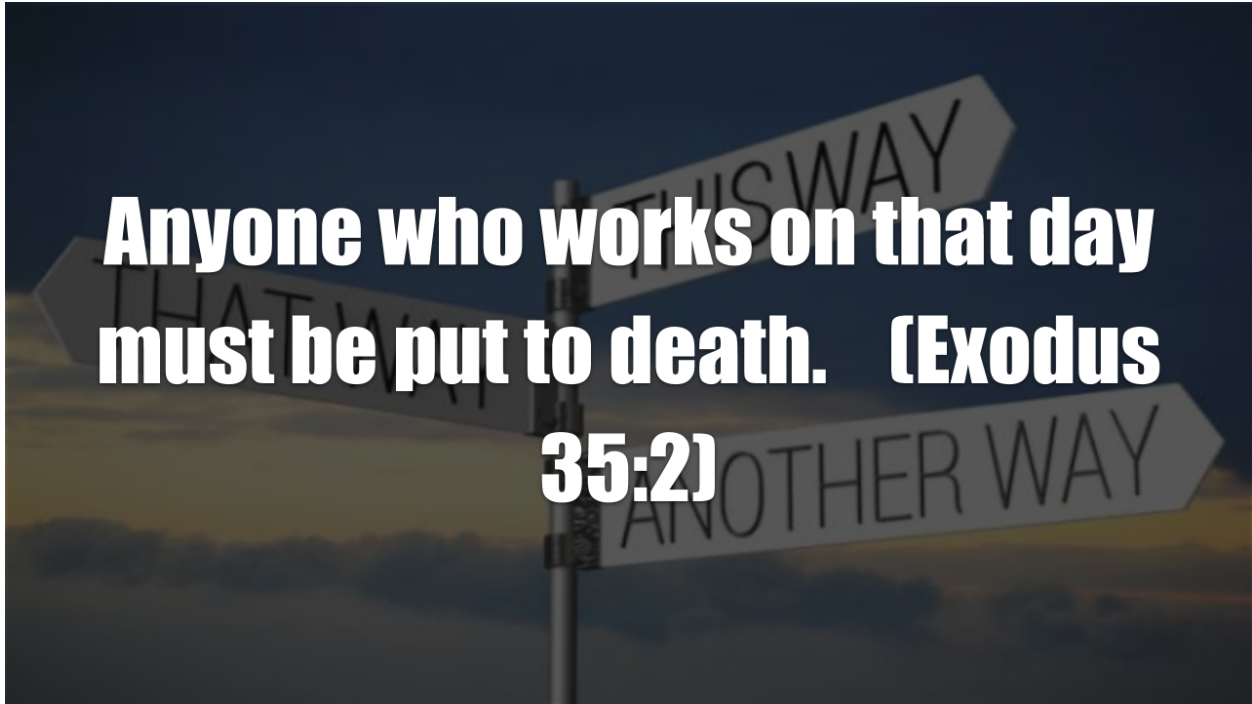


**You must realize that **the Sabbath**  
**is the LORD's gift to you.** That is why  
he gives you a two-day supply on  
the sixth day, so there will be  
enough for two days.  
(Exodus 16:29)**

The Sabbath is the Lord's Gift to you...

It's a gift. And most of us love that gift in theory. Most of us recognize that we need rest. Most of us love the idea of a break. Right? It's not like we skip truly Sabbathing because we're like, "I don't need a break. I'm too strong for rest." No, we know we need to stop and breathe, we just don't.

Which is why the Bible had to say this...



**Anyone who works on that day  
must be put to death. (Exodus  
35:2)**

Isn't that kind of funny how one verse says "this is a gift to you" and then a few chapters later Moses has to add, and if you don't accept that gift, we will kill you.

Sounds crazy until you look at our lives. We all know we need to stop. I was going to get into the psychology of rest and there were so many articles that I couldn't even sort through them. Thousands of studies and they all concluded that we need more rest. I didn't see a single headline that read, "we need less rest."

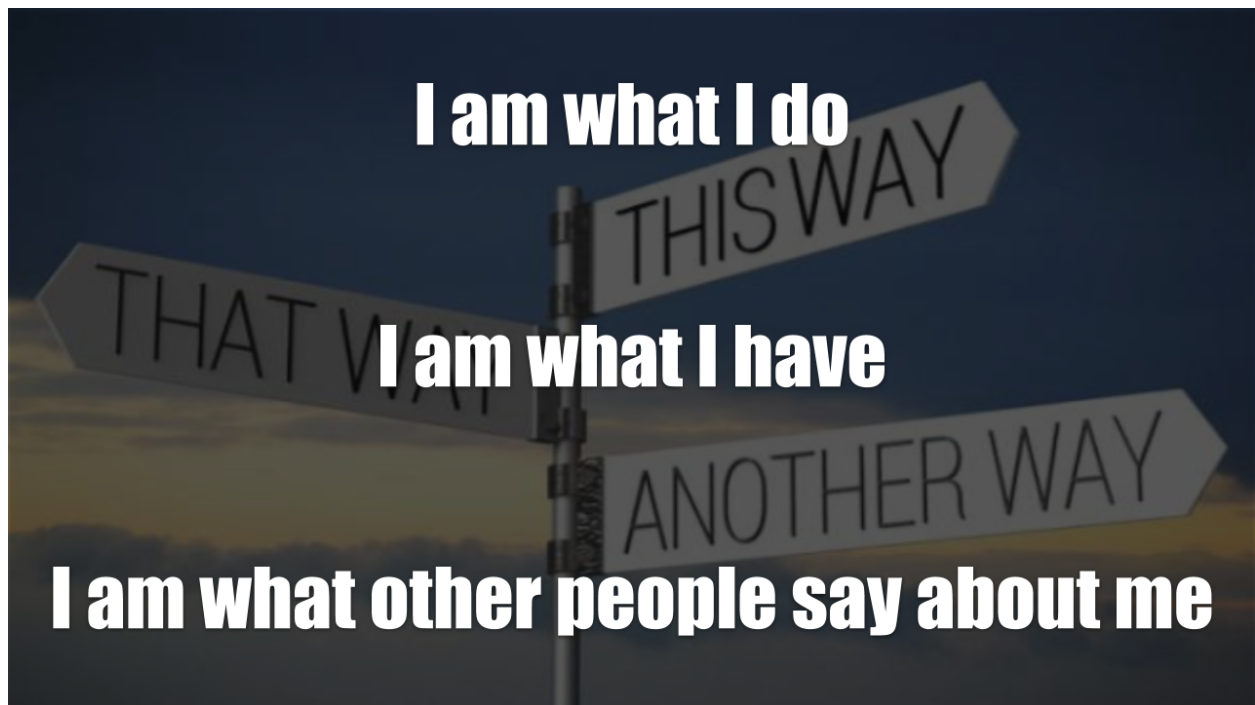
We don't stop long enough to rest. And what makes it worse is the current war around work. There are fewer and fewer people willing to do physical, manual labor which leads older generations to question the work ethic of younger generations. But here's the problem with that, most of us in the older generation have confused quantity of work with quality of work. We've made busyness a virtue. We brag about how unBiblical we are. "How you doing?" "I'm busy, busy, busy". None of us treat it like a confession like we should. "How you doing?" "I'm just really struggling to

obey God. I can't seem to quit sinning with my work. I haven't taken a full day off in quite a while."

I know I've kind of morphed from Contemplative Worship to Sabbath but I think there are three lies that keep us from doing both, and think Jesus was confronted by all three lies when he was engaging in the contemplative disciplines.

Jesus spent 40 days in Silence, Solitude, and Stillness in the wilderness. Satan showed up and told Jesus to turn a stone to bread, He then told Jesus to prove who he was by throwing himself from the top of the temple because it was said of him that angels would catch him. Then Satan offered Jesus everything if he'd worship wrongly.

Hidden in these three temptations are these three lies...



Most of us are driven by at least one of these lies.

Satan told Jesus, “you are what you do”. Do a miracle. Make bread from gravel. You only have value if you are DOING. You don’t have any intrinsic worth, you are your work.

Satan told Jesus, “you are what people say about you.” Show everyone who you are by fulfilling the scripture.” You only have value if they like you. You only have worth if you are popular and seen. If they don’t accept you, how do you even know who you are?

Satan told Jesus, “you are what you have”. Whoever dies with the most toys wins. The only thing that is really important is what you can accumulate. Bend the rules and I’ll give you all the stuff. You have no value if you have no money. And if you start to gain a little, you only have worth if you don’t notice that other guy who has more. If you look at his stuff, you’ll be worthless until you have more.

And I’d love to say that being a Christian exempts you from these lies, but these carry right into our Church life.

You are what you do, so you pray and you give, and you serve and what makes it worse is that you feel worthless if you ever have to say, “no.” You only have value if you do.

You are what you have so we accumulate more knowledge and cram in more memory verses and try to find a place where our innate gifts can shine because if we don’t have something to bring to the table, we feel worthless.

You are what other people say about you. Well this is Christianity to a “T”. We fake who we are so we don’t get judged. And we usually don’t even consider whether or not the person we are pretending to be is Biblical, we just don’t want people to think poorly of us. We want them to think we’re a good Christian.

These are lies and I believe with all my heart that true freedom comes from recognizing them as lies and refusing to believe them. Jesus didn’t make a

sandwich out of a stone because he didn't have to do anything to feel valuable. He didn't have to swan dive from the temple so people would ooo and ahhh over who he was. And he didn't need stuff to validate himself.

Why?

Because just before going into the wilderness, Jesus was Baptized and God spoke from Heaven. "You are my Son". That was where Jesus got his value. Not from his work or his stuff or his reputation. "This is My Son."

This is why I believe the Contemplative Disciplines are so important. When you commit to a time of silence, solitude and stillness, there is nothing you can do to earn favor with God.

We say we know that God loves us just as we are, but we then set out to do everything we can to earn that love.

But, If you're silent, you can't offer Him beautiful prayers, or songs, or flowery praises.

If you're alone, there's no one to see you worshipping. No one is going to think you are super spiritual.

If you're still, you aren't going to be saving the world. You aren't going to be serving or doing.

You are simply going to God and trusting that He loves you, just as you are. When you do nothing, and give nothing, and reach no one. And I promise you, if you don't currently practice Silence, solitude and stillness, if you give it a shot, you will be confronted with the three lies. You'll think this is stupid, I should be doing something. This is just lazy. Or, how is this going to help the world? If we all sit around chanting ohmmms, doesn't the world

just keep going to hell? Or, I should at least do a devotional so I can acquire some scripture. Use this time to gain something.

When we just stop and wait and listen and breathe and just BE, with God, we have a chance to overcome the lies. When you think about it, one of the most frequently discussed moments of Jesus' life, His confrontation with Satan and his victory over temptation, didn't happen in the chaos of ministry or the powerful feeling of having thousands of people follow him through the countryside and hang on his every word, or the wealth of knowing a fish sandwich and a glass of water can become a feast complete with great wine any time you want, it wasn't in the midst of all of this that Jesus was confronted with the enemy's biggest lies. It was while getting away and stopping and just being God's beloved.



I'm going to reiterate that I'm a hypocrite. I am not great at this. For over 15 years I've been trying to practice the Contemplative Disciplines and I still struggle like crazy.



I think I actually fear silence. The very first thing I do when I get in a car is turn on a book or music or podcast. I have headphones playing something as I walk through Home Depot. Literally the only silence I experience is when it's intentional.

I also don't do solitude. Partially because I have 1,000 kids, but even before kids I hated to be alone. In fact, the very first morning Esther and I spent as a married couple, Esther went into the bathroom to do her business. She locked the door. I found this weird so I picked the lock and sat on the floor and started opening Wedding cards while she went to the bathroom. It was years before she got up the nerve to tell me how offended she was by that intrusion. But to make it fair, I always left the door open when I went to the bathroom. Being alone is not my forte.

I also don't do stillness. The idea of unproductive time drives me crazy. It's why I listen to audio books. I can multitask. I can do one thing while learning at the same time. And beside the issue of productivity, I don't sit still well. I don't know if you've noticed, but I don't stand still very well when I preach. Stillness doesn't come naturally to me.

But the next couple months are going to be a great opportunity to practice this. Starting next week we'll be diving into our Saints series. This Thursday is Halloween which means that Friday is November 1st, classically call All Hallowed's Day, or All Saints Day. So what we do here at OTCC is we stretch that out over the entire month of November and we study a different Saint each week. Well, the fourth Saint we are going to study is Anthony of Egypt. He was one of the first Desert Fathers and he committed his life to the contemplative practices. Though I don't want to give anything away, Anthony lived from around 250 to the early 300s. Contemplative Christianity goes back a long way.

So we're going to talk about what Anthony brought to the table and it will be a good reminder to practice Silence, Solitude and Stillness. Then we'll be into Advent which at Open Table, is a contemplative practice in and of itself.

We try to do what we call the Decrescendo during Advent. So instead of cranking things up as we draw towards Christmas, we try to front load all of our church activity early in the Advent season and then while the world is getting crazier and faster, we do this totally subversive thing by slowing down and quieting our hearts and choosing to meditate on hope, peace, joy, and love in the midst of the insanity.

For me personally, Advent is the perfect time to practice the Contemplative Disciplines because whenever I feel myself getting caught up in the business and intensity that is necessary just to get through December in America, I set aside an hour here or there to regroup and quiet my heart and wait.

So here's how I would love for us to respond to this.

We're going to take communion in silence. Just as an exercise. Let's see what it feels like to just sit in God's presence. Have you ever watched a dramatic movie scene when they take the music out of it? Often we barely recognize the music until it's gone. But it's truly weird to see a movie scene that normally has music when they pull the music out. There's a great one from Return of the Jedi at the end when the saviors are entering the hall to receive medals. The scene is basically all music and when they pull it out, it's super awkward. I suspect taking communion with no music will be like that.

Then over the next month as we draw toward Advent, experiment with Silence, Solitude, and Stillness. Schedule it if you have to. Set aside 30 minutes to just sit, quiet and alone and try to experience the presence of God. Don't do it while driving or jogging or some other activity. This needs to be separate time. See what God says to you or shows you. If your mind goes crazy at first and bounces all over, no problem. Let it go. Just maintain silence, solitude and stillness. Journal through the process and see how you do. If you immediately fall asleep, no problem. It probably means your not resting enough.

It could be that you'll hear mice scuttering through the attic. That's ok too.

This isn't legalism. Don't let it become another chore to accomplish. Just experiment with what it might look like to just BE.

Let's go to the table...