

COVENANT

“EMPLOYED OR LAID ASIDE”

- Week 4 -

We’ve covered a lot of ground to this point, but you’re halfway through now! Congratulations! Here’s your recap: Week 1, we addressed the main problem, that we *really* like control. But, that sense of comfort and security can often be an illusion. So, when we begin to see our lives as a gift from God and give control back over to God, we can enjoy a sense of peace on the journey. Since then we’ve gotten into some specific areas of our lives, like the anxiety caused by our jobs and finances. And last week we covered the times of suffering in our lives. And hopefully, in the midst of all that, you’ve begun to see the power of God’s promises and our need to trust in them.

Again today, we’re going to look at a specific area in life that causes us anxiety, and what God promises from His side of the Covenant. But first, here’s another hypothetical to get us rolling.

Question 1: A massive solar flare knocks out all electronic devices for 24 hours. Televisions, phones, even cars, all worthless. (Hey, it could happen.) The weather is nice, so you don’t have to chop wood for a fire to stay warm, and you have enough fruit roll ups to survive the day. So, how do you spend your time?

The Wesley Covenant Prayer has been our foundation for understanding this need for control, and how to surrender our lives to God. As you’ve been praying it every day over the course of this series, (pause for a moment of holy guilt to set in... it’s okay, keep at it!) hopefully, it’s beginning to sink in and speak to you in powerful ways about your relationship with God.

Last week, we talked about how we sometimes view God as a magic genie, who’s just supposed to grant us wishes. But that’s not how prayer works. Prayer is a conversation. Prayer is our opportunity to quit trying so hard to run life and relax in the comfort of a God who loves and cares for us. The lines of The

Covenant Prayer that we're studying now are difficult, but when viewed in the right way, are exactly this... a reminder of our dependence on a loving, compassion Parent. Here's the next line.

**Let me be employed for thee,
or laid aside for thee.**

Again, at first glance, we kinda go, "Umm... aren't we supposed to have a God-given purpose in life for which we are supposed to be always working? Aren't we always supposed to be 'employed' in God's service? Why would we ever be 'laid aside'?" The answer is, of course, yes. God has given each one of us specific gifts and abilities to be used for a purpose. So, what does it mean to be, "laid aside"?

Well, even though we are always to be about the work that God has in mind for us, fulfilling the unique, individual purpose God has for our lives, we must also be mindful of times of rest. Praying that you're okay being "laid aside" is not a bad thing. For us, it should be a reminder that, in the midst of the craziness, God calls us to take breaks to balance our lives, to re-center ourselves, and to recharge our batteries.

Question 2: Always our "Scale of 1 to 10" question... how good are you at taking times to rest and recharge your batteries? 10 = My life is in complete balance. I'm basically a Buddhist monk, learn from my wisdom. 1 = I haven't taken a break since Sean Astin was a Goonie.

It's awesome to think that God wants us to take times of rest. In fact, it's actually more than that: God *commands* us to rest. There's a book in the Bible called "Exodus" that tells the story of the early Israelite people escaping captivity in Egypt and trying to figure out how to organize their society. (Feel free to pause here and watch Disney's, "Prince of Egypt," then Charlton Heston in "The Ten Commandments," for the backstory. We'll wait. Now 4 hours later...) Having been slaves in Egypt, they're a complete mess with no rules or laws or expectations. So, their leader Moses has a series of little one-on-ones with God, who gives Moses lists of commands that will help to organizing the people. The most famous section of all these commands is what we call, "The Ten Commandments." You may be familiar with some of them. (In fact, feel free to pause your small group and play a little game. Without looking, who can name the most of the 10 Commandments? Winner gets...respect. Or a candy bar. Probably just respect.) But along with "Don't steal," "Don't lie," "Don't kill," there's one that many people forget is in there. It goes like this:

⁸ "Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹ You have six days each week for your ordinary work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the Lord your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you. ¹¹ For in six days the Lord made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them; but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy.

-Exodus 20:8-11 NLT

And not only is this one of the Big 10, it actually comes before the commands to not lie or steal or murder. It's THAT important! God *commands* us to rest. That church-word, "Sabbath," is just a Hebrew

word that means, “to pause from labor.” But it’s fascinating and eye-opening to think that, just as lying or stealing or committing adultery is breaking one of the 10 Commandments... so is *not resting*. It’s a big deal!

Question 3: How does it feel to see that resting is one of the Ten Commandments? Is there a little pang of guilt? Does it change your perspective at all?

We’ve become a 24/7 society. We work or study or run our household all week, then fill up our “down time” with clubs and events and every activity known to humankind for our kids. We run ourselves ragged for 7 days, pass out Sunday night, then start the race over again on Monday. Sometimes it feels like we’re busy 48/7.

This scripture from the Bible gives us two unique insights into being “laid aside.” First, it’s only one of two commandments that doesn’t begin with, “Don’t.” Rather, it begins with the word, “Remember,” as if God knew we’d forget it. And we do! We forget to rest. We prioritize everything else above it and only take time to rest if we have time. This command should remind us that it is imperative for our own health and well-being to rest.

Second, the explanation of this command is so telling. It’s the longest of the 10 because God knew it would need more fleshing out. The others are fairly self-explanatory. Don’t steal. Got it. Don’t lie. Okay good. But this one? God knew we’d need some elaboration. And the way it ends seals the deal.

¹¹ For in six days the Lord made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them; but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy.

Even God rested! God isn’t asking you to do something God didn’t do, too. And here’s the cool part of it... God didn’t need to rest. God is God, Almighty Creator of the Universe. So why rest? It’s the very last word there... because rest is *holy*. Now, I’m kinda guessing God didn’t watch a Harry Potter marathon on the Sabbath after creating the Universe. (Maybe God did? Who am I to judge?) But if we’re calling it *holy* rest, we have to be mindful of *how* we’re resting. Attending worship can be a form of holy rest. Spending time praying or in mindfulness can be restful in a holy way, as can walks or exercise or naps. (Yup, a good nap is a holy thing. Even Jesus did it.) But that is our challenge from this scripture: *Remember* to take times of *holy* rest. God did it. So can you.

Question 4: Do you have a practice of holy rest? What is it? If not, what is one thing you can incorporate into your routine this week to practice holy rest?

As we pray the Wesley Covenant Prayer to close today, remember, this line of the prayer is a reminder of our priorities. God is asking you, for our side of the Covenant, to remember to rest because it's good for you. It slows you down, reduces anxiety, calms your nerves, lowers your blood pressure. And most of all, it allows you to reconnect with God. God's side of the Covenant is that God will meet you there. So, when we pray this line of the prayer, "let me be employed for thee, or laid aside for thee," think of it in these terms. "God, give me opportunities to fulfill the unique purpose you have given me, but to balance that with times of *holy* rest so I can reconnect with you."

Let us pray:

**I am no longer my own but thine.
Put me to what thou wilt,
rank me with whom thou wilt.
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be employed for thee,
or laid aside for thee.
Let me be exalted for thee,
or brought low for thee.
Let me have all things,
let me have nothing.
Let me be full,
let me be empty.
I freely and humbly yield all things
to thy pleasure and thy disposal.
And now, sweet Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
I am thine and thou art mine.
And may this covenant made on Earth,
be ratified in heaven.
So be it.**