

WHAT'S NEXT ON YOUR LIST?
[written in oral form]

As much as possible, I try to have my sermons *feel* like the essence of the passages, and not just say the message.

For example, last Sunday was about dancing, so the sermon was upbeat and playful.

If I wanted to project the feel of today's theme, then I would put on some soft music, and let everyone sit back and rest.....because both passages deal with resting.

Actually, after a busy week of VBC and with the humid heat, that does sound appealing.

.....ummm... looks like some of you have already gotten in the mood.

However, I'll try to Not put you to sleep,.... because there is definitely more in these two texts than just a call to rest, and you wouldn't want to miss that. So, we'll begin.

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From 2 Samuel 7:

King David is now the monarch over the united Kingdoms. He has accomplished much, with of course God's help. One of his crowning achievements was recently moving the Arc of God to Jerusalem, the new capital of his great kingdom. The Arc was considered like a portal for God on earth.

With that task completed, David is faced with a new challenge – a time of respite.

It seems that God has removed any pressing needs away from him.

Today's passage opens with King David and the prophet Nathan standing on the front porch of David's magnificent NEW home.

He just had dinner with Nathan, and was giving him the grand tour of the house.

*It is always wise to stay on the good side of a prophet; a little hospitality never hurts.*

Strolling on the front porch and stroking his beard David remarked to Nathan, "This is a fine."..... **and then there was a pause ....**

It suddenly hit David (a guilty eureka) that here he was enjoying the fruits of his success—his wonderful mansion, and not too far away was the Ark of God, still sitting under the same old tent.

David turned to Nathan, and was about to declare his intentions of building a huge, worthy house for God (a place for the Ark), ... when Nathan did one of those "prophet things," and foretold David's intentions without David saying a word.

Nathan interrupts and tells David, "Go... do all that you have in mind, **For the Lord is with you!**"

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A couple of interesting things to note:

One is how typical it is what David did? It is usually not until we are ahead of the game, and feeling pretty good about things, when we decide that we'll do something Big for God.

And the second, even prophets can be presumptuous.
Without even consulting God, Nathan believed that his opinion was God's opinion.
It's good that we never do that sort of thing in churches these days – assuming to know the mind and desires of God. (?)

The error of Nathan's declaration was quickly pointed out to him.

That night, God spoke to Nathan and said, "WRONG! I don't want David to build me a house, and..... you go straighten that out with him." And, God proceeded to explain why.

Reading the text, one can't help but hear a touch of hurt feelings in God's explanation, which makes sense.... since David's concern for God's place was really an afterthought.
Imagining my friend Charlie who has a Yiddish accent reading verses 5-9 helps me get a better sense of God's attitude . [Sounds like: *Why do you care now? I've been out in this tent all these years, and did I every complain? But, now you think of me.]*

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So, the next day, Nathan swallowed some humble pie, and went and shared God's message with David.

*We all know that it is difficult to admit when we are wrong.  
I think it is even more difficult to admit an error about speaking for God. But, that is just what Nathan did.*

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What really strikes me is the heart of the message, which was: building a home for God WAS NOT God's plan for David. God's plan, at least for the time being, was for David to rest!

A lot is said in that message, not the least of which is that God may have questioned David's motive.

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*We are wise to serve God from love, and not from guilt or a senses of duty.*  
I think David was feeling a little guilty..... OR.... perhaps David was suffering from an **Edifice Complex**.

An Edifice complex is that desire, that some influential people have, to leave a structural legacy. In other words, immortality through a monument or a building named after the person.

Perhaps, David's motives did play a part, but more importantly is that God's plan was for David to have a time of rest.

Hear this message clearly:  
God was turning down David's gesture to glorify God, and instead God wanted what was in David's best interest! Impressive.

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What does that message say to hyper church people who are always doing something "great for God?"
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You know, from a pastor's perspective, it is tempting to always preach, "DO, DO, DO" .... that we should constantly be busy doing things, and more things,.....BUT.... in light of what is being said in this passage, the message of do- do- do, sounds,..... well..... like "Do -do."

Here we have God telling David, "Nah, don't bother. I want you to rest."

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Have you ever heard a pastor tell a congregation, "I believe sometimes it is God's will that we take it easy and.... rest." ?

Imagine that..... Aren't you glad you didn't fall asleep?

This message does seem to clash with how we do church work!

We tend to have a business model that demands we must grow and keep busy.

The subtle and tacit overture in the church domain is..... you better feel guilty if you are NOT constantly busy for Godas if God wants to bleed us dry!

Consider David, who takes some initiative, only to be told... It isn't necessary, and that God wants him to rest.

God provided for David. God removed all his enemies / his threats and.... his assumption that he must do something for God's sake. The busyness for God myth was removed.

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And, God removed David's enemies.

Now, most of us don't have enemies in the barbarian / violent sense, but we do have our own personal enemies – our burdens, fears and threats. We do have our own demons that control us.

They could be expectations too far to reach... or...

thinking that more money will give us security and peace... or....the myth that we have to defend God or always be productive.

A common demon that controls us is thinking that we have to be in control. .... strange how "control" is .... well.... so controlling.

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Yesterday, I came to a better understanding of how powerful removing the threats / the enemy is.

My German Shepherd, Ziggy, used to protect our acreage from packs of coyotes. That is no longer a concern or reality, yet Ziggy barks intensely at dogs that walk by our house. We have a corner house.

And, he barks at dogs while we take him for a walk. So, we had a trainer come by yesterday to help us end this noisy behaviour.

I had the erroneous assumption that Ziggy enjoyed barking at dogs, but the trainer said that it's stressful for him. Ziggy thinks he **has to** protect us and our property. Moreover, his barking was Not productive, which is more stressful. The dogs did not flee like coyotes. They are on leashes; they would bark back and not run away.

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The dog trainer is really a human trainer. We were taught how to release that burden from Ziggy so that he could relax and enjoy life.

We were shown how to let Ziggy know that we are taking care of things and he need not worry about it.

Ziggy is learning to let go and to trust us.

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God removed the threats / the burden from David so that he could rest.....and depend on God.

I wonder if God can do the same for us. ???????????

The bigger question is: can we let go and let God set the pace and agenda?

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The Mark 6 text, presents Jesus leading his disciples away to a place of rest.....AND, THAT PLACE IS A DESERT!

They were over-worked. The text states that they had NO time for leisure, even for a relaxed meal.

Sensing their need for rest, Jesus directed them to leave / go away from their demands.

*Sometimes our burdens and threats are removed by being lead to a place where they do not exist.*

Interestingly, Jesus brought them to a deserted place. They didn't go to a resort or a spa or even a to a nice hotel. They didn't go out for recreation or entertainment. They went out to a deserted place without Wi-Fi or cell phone service.

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Recreation and entertainment are fine, but.... both are mostly distractions. They mask/ cover-up the burdens, and at best, only provide limited rest. Watching TV, a computer or smart phones is not really granting us rest.

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I believe we can learn from the example in this story. When we need rest, we should REST....., AND THAT'S ALL,..... PERIOD.

Rest is doing NOTHING, but the bare essentials.

Rest is .... rest!

And, pausing to do nothing is difficult for many of us. Our culture has programmed us to GO- to be always "on," ....to always be plugged in.

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Leslie is probably thinking to herself, "He should listen to what he's saying."

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So,.... I'll confess: I find it very difficult to stop and rest. It seems like I always have something that needs to be done.

I have a tough time just sitting or pausing to rest. ~~~~~

For example, about a month ago, I did an overnight camping trip.

In the morning, I was the first one up, and after I made some coffee, I sat down to enjoy the quiet of the forest. I knew it would be good for me to sit and rest, but I lasted....maybe 10 minutes.

So, ..... I am preaching to myself, too.

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We all need to periodically rest, especially when we are jaded and overworked.

And, REST is NOT escaping or flooding our mind with different thoughts.

Rest is, obviously, simply..... Resting, and that can be a challenge because it mandates that somehow we must be free from our own need to control and our expectations to produce.
True rest requires that we are free from torment/ free from our burdens.

Rest is important.
Jesus would make a place and take time to rest.
Even God rested.

Rest is part of the divine plan for life – the Sabbath!

We can't keep working and being busy all the time, and expect to remain physically, emotionally and spiritual vibrant.

We all need a time of rest. Our body needs rest. Our minds need rest, and so do our souls.

I think we know that, but..... do we believe it and practice it??

In a way, today's message gives all of us, including myself, Permission to allow time to rest!
And, for some of us, this will be a new and big challenge.

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BUT, there is a catch!

Rest is not really the thrust of today's passages!  
Rest is possible, after we grasp the lesson presented in the texts.  
*As I said at the beginning, there is more in these passages than a call to rest.*

The critical lesson to be gleaned..... is: We would be wise to let go, listen to God and follow God's will. Let go and follow God.

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Is the burden on you and I.....or God?
Is God the leader?

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One lesson, this past week at VBC, was about following Jesus.  
To help them understand, we played follow the leader. In this case, I was the leader and they were to follow me. I walked around the room doing various things. The kids instinctively or from behaviour modification.....formed a line and tried to mimic my actions.

When I finished, I asked who was following me?  
They all thought they were.  
I pointed out that actually only one person was following me, the rest were following the person in front of them.  
And, things can get a little fuzzy or foggy on down the line....away from the leader.

Following tradition or assumed correctness seemed right to Nathan and David, but as God stressed to them: they were not **following** God's will. They were acting as if they were in control. [repeat]

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I will give my dog a wonderful gift. I will take away his stress by removing the burden that he has to control the world that is beyond his control.

After just one day, Ziggy already seems more relaxed and content.

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Imagine if you can,..... all your burdens / all your demons removed.

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Now.....imagine letting go of them.....

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