

MONDAY, 7/8

Matthew 11:28-30

I wonder if Jesus' words resonate with you and your experience? Do you feel as if you're struggling, and, as a result, lack peace? Maybe you are carrying a heavy burden that has you feeling trapped? If so, then I promise that you are not alone.

I think the majority of us feel these effects. Some of it is due to the nature of life and its demands. We also try to carry things ourselves, in spite of having a covenant partner in God who offers to help shoulder the load. Another significant part of it is the culture in which we live.

Our society is one that produces stressed out, burned out people. Our pace is so rapid that we're always chasing our tails. There is never enough time in the day. Even as we get to the end of a day, we wonder if we've really accomplished anything of real value. If we're honest with ourselves, it doesn't feel like this is what life is meant to be. The truth is, life isn't meant to be like that.

Throughout the Bible, we see God's intent for His creation is to experience an abundance of life through Him, and yet so few people today claim to experience such fullness. God designed a pattern of living that leads us toward this life. God knit within the fabric of creation itself a pattern that involves seasons of rest, pruning, growth, and producing. The reality is that we have abandoned that model. We live on overdrive trying to produce, produce, and produce some more--and it's killing us, physically and spiritually.

The Good News is that God has another way for us, and we can choose it. You can choose it today by taking Jesus up on His invitation to come to Him with your burdens. When we take Jesus up on His offer and invite Him to share, if not take, the heavy load we're carrying, then we can begin to discover the joy that comes from living in the divine rhythm God intended for us from the beginning.

Praying Together: "Jesus, I want to trade my burdens for Your yoke that is easy to bear. Lead me. Amen."

TUESDAY, 7/9

John 10:10

Jesus is our example of what it looks like to live into the divine rhythm God intended for His creation. Jesus rested, but He was never lazy. Jesus worked hard, but He was never stressed out. Jesus never allowed His circumstances to dictate the condition of His heart. He seemed to live in this life-giving rhythm with His Father.

Jesus came to give us that same kind of life. In this passage, Jesus calls Himself the Good Shepherd. Jesus contrasts Himself to a thief. The thief comes to take from the sheep. A good shepherd seeks to give life to his sheep. Jesus says that He came that we could experience life to the fullest-- in other words, an overabundance of life.

Jesus first made it possible to enjoy life to the fullest by enabling us to be reconciled to God, the ultimate life-giving relationship. The first step toward abundant life comes from walking in relationship with God. We come alongside God and allow Him to shepherd us. What we will discover is that God will lead us toward abundant life. For many of us, that is what we need. Rather than handling the majority of our life on our own strength and wisdom (or lack thereof at times), we need to surrender to God's leadership. We need to trust that He and He alone can lead us to the life-giving pastures and waters we need.

Will you trust God to lead you to life in all its fullness?

Praying Together: "God, I place my life in Your hands that You might lead me to abundant life. Amen."

WEDNESDAY, 7/10

Genesis 1:1-2

When God began to create, there was nothing. Zip. Zilch. Nada. That is really difficult for us to imagine. We're going to have to settle for some mystery in trying to understand what this must have been like, but the writer of Genesis makes it clear that there was no shape or form to creation. This is important for us to recognize in the sense that God wasn't working with an existing structure, but rather He created something altogether new. This means that God is the designer and architect of creation. It was His idea.

Here is the good news about that. No one knows more about a creation than the one who created it. He was the one who thought of it. He was the one who stressed over every detail, making tweaks here and there until He came up with the perfect design. God is One who knows more about His creation than anyone else. This means that He should be our authority when it comes to understanding everything about creation, including ourselves.

From the beginning, God wove into His creation a pattern for abundant, fruitful living. Just like creation, there had been no previous guideline for sustaining life. We're going to explore the creation account in more detail over the coming weeks, but this pattern is evident here in Genesis 1-2. As we get into these chapters, we'll see that God was highly intentional with the order of creation. When His intention is carried out perfectly, we see that it is deemed "good". Our takeaway is that God's design for His creation--His intent--is good.

May God open our eyes to the goodness of His intention for our lives so that in seeing the goodness, we might shape our lives around His design.

Praying Together: "Lord, open my eyes to see Your desire for Your creation. Amen."

THURSDAY, 7/11

Matthew 6:33

This verse comes out of a greater teaching on worry. Jesus is trying to help the people see the faithlessness that leads us to worry and the fruitlessness that ensues. The ultimate issue at stake for the worrier is one of identity. Do I truly trust God as my Father and covenant partner? Although I hate to oversimplify a condition as common and deep as worry, Jesus, in a way, does that here in this section. If you are worrying, you are at best forgetting that God is your Father who loves you.

Another problem with worry is that it tends to drive our lives. It causes us to act outside our rational selves and compels us to spend energy in unnecessary places.

After exposing the deeper issue, Jesus moves in verse 33 to the solution, which includes a dramatic shift in focus. Jesus essentially tells us to stop fixating on the object of our worry but rather focus our attention on God's Kingdom and His righteousness.

The truth is we are going to place our energy somewhere. Are we going to allow our concerns to dictate where our energy goes, or are we, in faith, going to channel our resources toward God and our growth in His likeness? Like the thief in Jesus' teachings on the Good Shepherd, the first will only take life from us, while the former will lead us to life.

I wonder what it looks like for you to seek God's Kingdom and righteousness today.

Praying Together: "Father, I want to pursue You and what You have in store for me rather than chase after things which I cannot control. Amen."

FRIDAY, 7/12

Proverbs 3:5-6

Building on yesterday's passage on worry, we proceed with an encouragement to trust.

Proverbs is attributed to King Solomon and is written from the perspective of a father's wisdom being passed onto his child. For many, these two verses sum up the greater collection of the wisdom collection.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not lean on your own understanding," he says. Trust is the antithesis of worry. Whereas worry tends to send us to and fro, trust steadies our feet. Trusting in One as great as God plants our feet on solid ground and allows us to gain proper perspective.

What makes this such a profound statement is that it acknowledges that there are many things we do not understand. That can be tough for us to admit at times, but it's true. There are many things that are beyond us and we need to know to whom we can turn when our understanding falls short.

When we apply this to the idea of God's divine rhythm for our lives, we see that oftentimes we try to live the best we can. We often pattern our lives and schedules on those around us, or they are dictated to us by others. Often our commitments keep us running every which way. It's easy for us to throw up our hands and say that there isn't a better way, that it isn't possible to do any differently than what we are doing. What we really need to do is consult the Lord.

The truth is God has a design for our lives that is good and life-giving. We must trust Him, and as His children, begin aligning our lives under His care. When we invite God to lead us to a life-giving rhythm for our lives, we can trust that He will show us what that looks like. He will bring clarity to us and, in this way, help make our paths straight.

Praying Together: "God, where I am limited, You are unlimited. I trust You to make my paths straight. Amen."

SATURDAY, 7/13

Titus 3:5-7

One of the issues we face today in our culture is that we routinely define our worth based on what we do. Our identities center around our activities and careers. While neither of these is a bad thing, they were never meant to be the criteria out of which we measure our value. All this does is create competition and encourage us to compare ourselves with others. This spirit is not that of Christ.

You can't love someone the way Jesus intends when you're caught up comparing yourself to them. The system of comparison plays into the idea of works. It's easy to use works to measure our value. This is why religion has often fallen back into using works to display righteousness. The problem with works is that we use them to feel secure in who we are, but they never really provide the assurance we need. Our source of security must come from loving and obeying God.

Here Paul points us to the work of Jesus as the defining mark of our identity. It isn't our works that prove our value, but rather the work accomplished through Jesus that puts both our worth and His on display.

If we want to live into the fullness of life with Jesus, then we must have our identity rooted in what He has done for us rather than in what we have done. Our worth and identity come from being received as His own by faith.

Praying Together: "Teach us to seek You in all that we do. May we long for Your Presence in this world. Amen."

SUNDAY, 7/14

Genesis 5:1

Genesis 5 begins with a recap of the creation narrative before the author launches forward in time via a genealogy. The author uses only one line to capture God's creative intent for humanity. What does he include? The author speaks to the fact that we were created "in the image of God."

There is much to say about our being made in the image of God. Being created in God's image means we bear the imprint of God upon us. While all creation is an expression of God's glory, we are the ones who reflect Him. It also means that we share many of God's characteristics, although some of those were severely tarnished after the Fall. This shared sense of identity also points to the fact that we were created to represent God in the world.

When you put these together, you see that bearing the image of God implies that you share a unique and intimate relationship with Him. This echoes Paul's words in Acts 17 when he said, "For in Him (God), we live, move, and have our being." Life itself is found in God. This points us to the reality that we are able to live into the fullness of life only while under God's care and design.

This leads us to the Incarnation, God's embracing human flesh in Jesus. As both God and man, Jesus reveals the fullness of God's imprint; in other words, Jesus shows us our true selves. Jesus helps us see what we should be. May we continue to pattern our lives after Jesus and live fully into God's image.

Praying Together: "Father, I know that I am Yours. You created me like Yourself, and that I am my truest self when I am living in Your will. Guide me to understand what you would have my life look like, so that I may serve You most faithfully. Amen."