



A YEAR
OF SLOWING
DOWN

DAILY DEVOTIONS
FOR UNHURRIED LIVING



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DAY 1

REST IS HOLY

By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy. (Genesis 2:2-3)

THIS IS THE LAST WORD in the first creation story of Genesis. God's blessing of the seventh day as space to rest is a holy moment. Sabbath is the culmination of the creation story. We live in a culture that sometimes sees rest as a necessary evil to be minimized as much as possible. Or it sees rest as the moment we run out of gas for any more work. But rest isn't an absence of goodness. It is space to stop our working, enjoy God's goodness, and rest in his presence.

Resting is hard work. It requires strong personal leadership to say no once a week to measuring our lives by what we produce. It takes intentionality to slow down and cease our striving to achieve, acquire, and impress others and simply enjoy what God has given us. But God calls this Sabbath gift a holy thing.

I've sensed a daily invitation alongside this weekly Sabbath call. The creation story that starts our Scriptures describes the days of creation in a way that feels different. As each day of creation ends, we hear that "there was evening, and there was morning." This way of envisioning a day places rest first.

I've been experimenting with seeing my workdays as beginning with rest rather than ending in a collapse after a long day. My various practices of numbing, escaping, or avoiding don't bear good fruit. I'm finding it more fruitful when my work grows out of places of soul rest.

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How do you find yourself escaping, self-distracting, or numbing in the evening? How might God invite you to enjoy rest in his presence in the hours before you go to bed?

DAY 2

WHY DOES GOD BLESS YOU?

I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. (Genesis 12:2 NRSV)

THE WORDS ABOVE ARE God's blessing to Abraham when he called this wealthy son of an idol worshiper to leave his father's house, abandon all that was familiar, and obediently go to . . . well, God didn't tell him where. God's command to leave came with a promise but not with an itinerary. Abraham was obedient despite the vague instructions, and God was faithful and kept this promise.

Notice the heart of that promise. Like Abraham, I am blessed not just so that I'll be blessed; I am blessed so that God's blessing will flow to others through me. My bishop, Todd Hunter, often reminds us that we are blessed for the sake of others.

Of course I want to be blessed. We all do. But I also truly want to bless others. I want others to receive the good things from me and through me that I've received from a generous Father.

Most recently, though, I've realized I need to let myself be blessed. I've been resisting God's blessing because I'm focused on whether I deserve it. That's the wrong question. God isn't assessing whether I deserve his generosity. He is simply generous. This is how God treats us. Blessing is rooted in him, not us. God would love nothing more than for you and me to open ourselves fully to all the ways he desires to be generous. Doesn't that sound inviting?

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Reflect on someone you have seen blessing others with the blessings God has given them. If you've been on the receiving end of their blessing, share with them how God is honored in their actions.

DAY 3

THE GIFT OF THE LONG PATH

When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, "If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt." (Exodus 13:17)

GOD KNOWS WHAT BARRIERS will be too much for us. In kindness, he sometimes leads us on what feels like the long way so we're not overwhelmed by obstacles that would overcome us. We may complain about the long way because we don't understand that God is sparing us something.

We think the best path from here to there is straight. Sometimes the best path is quite crooked. God's goal may not be our arrival at a destination but our formation along the way. We can be goal-focused when God is process-focused. He is forming us. And the long way is sometimes the best path for God to help us grow.

Perhaps God has invited us to join him in the work of the kingdom. We think the main thing, then, is to get to work. God gives us the gift of working with him, but he also gives us the gift of making us ready and able to do that work well. God calls us not only to collaboration but also to friendship in the work.

We can learn to discern how God is inviting us to join him in his work. We can also learn to cooperate with the process by which we are made ready to do that work. And the process sometimes involves a longer path than we anticipated.

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How has your path felt more indirect than you would have wanted? How might this be a gift rather than a burden?

DAY 4

BETTER BACK THERE

Didn't we say to you in Egypt, "Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians"? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert! (Exodus 14:12)

IN THIS MOMENT OF CRISIS the people of Israel believe they were better off under Egyptian oppression than they are now, being threatened with Egyptian attack. They have forgotten their complaints of mistreatment and their cries for deliverance. They have forgotten their bondage in Egypt and instead imagine the abuse that is about to land on them at the hands of their enemy. Don't we sometimes have second thoughts about whether we really want to be rescued?

Isn't it like us to begin to have second thoughts when we face obstacles on our journey toward freedom? We think, "It was a lot better back there where we came from. There were a lot of good things back there." We forget two things: how bad it really was back there and how good it really is where God is bringing us! We become myopic and lose our sense of context.

Moses speaks to the fears of the people, saying, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still" (Exodus 14:13-14).

Fear and insecurity are enemies of faith. We can be so overwhelmed in the looming presence of our enemy that we fail to realize God is more real than any enemy before us. The power of God's promise is stronger than the threat of our enemies.

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In what ways are you tempted to look back at some stuck place in your past and experience selective amnesia? How might God's presence with you now be far better than that situation?

DAY 5

LED IN UNFAILING LOVE

*In your unfailing love you will lead
the people you have redeemed. (Exodus 15:13)*

GOD LEADS US AS his rescued people in love that will never fail. We are on a journey of renewal and restoration. Love restores what it treasures, and God treasures us. God has sought us out in his limitless delight over us. This has always been God's intention for us. I haven't the wisdom nor the strength to rescue myself. I couldn't buy my way out of the slavery in which God has found me. Mine is a hopeless slavery except that my loving, powerful God chooses to rescue me.

It helps to remember that this is the reality in which I walk with God. God's love and strength are reliably and always present with me. God leads and guides me with persistent care and wisdom. I am always being treated by God with affection, encouragement, and empowerment.

It is remarkable that the destination of this journey is the very place where God dwells. God is leading me closer to his home (and mine). God invites me to walk on paths that draw me closer to his heart and mind. God is leading me away from the false gods of Egypt and toward himself—the only true God!

God deals with every enemy we encounter on this journey. We are not abandoned or alone. God knows what will oppose or attack me before I do. God will put fear into the heart of those enemies who seek my harm. What good news!

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When you think of hard places you've traveled, how might it help to have a greater awareness that God is lovingly present with you in these very places?

TRAINING OR TELLING?

Teach [God's people] his decrees and instructions, and show them the way they are to live and how they are to behave. (Exodus 18:20)

JETHRO SPEAKS THESE WORDS to help Moses serve the people of God better. Exodus says that Moses sat alone morning to night hearing and deciding cases in light of God's law. His strategy was to "inform them" (Exodus 18:16) of God's laws and decrees. Jethro's counsel was to "teach them" and "show them the way." God wants to train us in righteousness rather than just inform us of righteous. I think of how I parented our sons when they were very young.

One morning my oldest son, Sean, was doing something to frustrate his brother Bryan and make him cry. Brothers do this to one another sometimes. My angry impulse was to lay down the law and tell Sean what he was doing wrong. But I had this passage in mind and wondered to myself if I could somehow teach him and show him instead of just informing him.

So I brought him over to me. Instead of my usual (and not very helpful) lecture, I told him I wanted to teach him and show him how to treat his brother kindly. I gave Sean a hug and said, "This is something kind you could do for Bryan." He wasn't too excited about my wonderful counsel.

A bit later I noticed Sean doing something that made Bryan laugh. I told him what a kind brother he was being. He lit up! Then he helped Bryan with a puzzle he was working on. Again I affirmed Sean's kindness. Sean was beaming! And without my urging, he gave Bryan a hug.

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Can you envision your heavenly Father looking for opportunities to train you in love and grace rather than informing and then reproving you? What happens to your desire to live well?

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