

New Rhythms for a New Year

January 8, 2017

To KNOW Christ and one another more deeply,
To CARE for one another in truth and in love,
To GROW as followers of Jesus.
- CG Mission Statement

Worship: Sovereign Over Us by Michael W. Smith

(Here is a song to help your group as you worship. Simply play the video and encourage people to use it to enter into a spirit of worship.)

There is strength within the sorrow
There is beauty in our tears
And You meet us in our mourning
With a love that casts out fear
You are working in our waiting
You're sanctifying us
When beyond our understanding
You're teaching us to trust

Your plans are still to prosper
You have not forgotten us
You're with us in the fire and the flood
You're faithful forever
Perfect in love
You are sovereign over us

You are wisdom unimagined
Who could understand Your ways
Reigning high above the Heavens
Reaching down in endless grace
You're the lifter of the lowly
Compassionate and kind
You surround and You uphold me
And Your promises are my delight

Your plans are still to prosper
You have not forgotten us
You're with us in the fire and the flood
You're faithful forever
Perfect in love
You are sovereign over us
(2x)

Even what the enemy means for evil
You turn it for our good
You turn it for our good and for Your glory
Even in the valley, You are faithful
You're working for our good
You're working for our good and for Your glory
(2x)

Your plans are still to prosper
You have not forgotten us
You're with us in the fire and the flood
You're faithful forever
Perfect in love
You are sovereign over us

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Icebreaker(s)

What is on your bucket list for this year?

Text for Discussion: Mark 1:35, 6:31

Turn in your Bibles and read these passages aloud together.

Aid for Discussion: Sermon Summary

With a new year comes a time of new resolutions – decisions about what we'll make more time for in 2017 or what habits we'll try to begin or break ourselves of. But each of these requires more of our time. What is our response? We move faster to get it all done, training ourselves to believe that the more we do, the better off we are. We've become addicted to the speed of our lives. It has become our rhythm. We run. We rush. We hurry.

What would it mean to live with the opposite assumption: that slower is better? Could we increase our potential by decreasing our activity? Spiritually speaking, this is the counterintuitive truth: we grow faster by going slower.

What does this look like? Habits of the spiritual life can be placed into two categories: habits of abstinence (*solitude, silence, fasting, sacrifice*) and habits of engagement (*prayer, study, service, worship*). It's easy to assume that this

second list holds the important spiritual habits. But it's worth considering whether the habits of disengagement are foundational and even prerequisites to those of engagement. The slowing they require makes room – mentally, spiritually, emotionally, even physically – for new rhythms in our lives.

Throughout the Bible, we see examples of slowing that result in greater power. Jesus finds strength in slowing. It was a regular habit, especially during the most critical moments of His ministry. The same is true for Moses, Elijah, Samuel, and many others in the Old Testament. This may be counterintuitive to our 21st century minds, but it raises the question: Why is this beneficial to us?

Slowing breaks the patterns of our ingrained behaviors. It separates us from the world's frantic pace and breaks us of the destructive anxiety which is bound to it. Instead, we are drawn into the centering rhythm of being in community with God. We realize and accept that we don't have to get it all done. Slowing returns you to you.

Slowing empowers us relationally. Quite simply, it enables us to engage in relationship and to be truly present with others. We can then walk through life together in community rather than on our own.

Slowing creates space for other spiritual habits. Just try to begin a new habit without laying the necessary foundation! It is preparation that makes a new habit sustainable.

Slowing places being before doing in our lives. We tend to base our identity on what we are able to accomplish. But in slowing – stripped of the distraction of our activities and accomplishments – we come face-to-face with God. We discover that God loves us because we are His children (1 John 3:1), not because of what we can do. Our identity is restored.

So, how do we do this? What are some practices that will help create new rhythms in our lives?

Solitude. Intentionally disengaging from our regular activities (for extended periods but also for brief times of solitude) is so much more important than we expect. We are making room for spiritual formation in our lives. And by setting aside time for God, the silence reminds us what it means to give each part of our lives to Him.

Silence. By acutely paying attention to our speech, we reveal how much of it is to posture ourselves in front of others. As we speak less, we allow ourselves to hear more of what God seeks to reveal about Himself and our lives.

Sabbath. It is God's way of trying to ensure that we have a rhythm of slowing. This purposeful slowing reveals just how important it is to Him. Sabbath is a day when we say "enough." It is a statement of trust. Slowing shows that we trust God will provide. We have enough in our lives because God is enough for us.

Guiding Question of the Week

(This question is intended as a target for the whole conversation. Do not ask for responses now. It will be repeated later in the study.)

How can you embrace the idea of "slowing down" this year?

Questions for Discussion

(Remember it is better to wrestle deeply with two good questions than gloss over many. Sub-bullets are intended for potential follow-up.)

1. David referenced 4 benefits of the practice of "slowing":
 - It breaks the ingrained patterns of our behavior.
 - It empowers us relationally.
 - It creates space for other spiritual habits.
 - It helps us to place "being" before "doing" in our lives.Does one of these resonate more than the others? Why?
2. Jesus repeatedly retreated from the crowds for solitude during His life (Luke 6:12, Matt 14, Mark 1:35, Mark 6:31, Luke 5:16). What can we learn from Jesus' example?
 - Do you have an ongoing rhythm of spiritual practices in your life? If so, what is it?

3. **Guiding Question: How can you embrace the idea of “slowing down” this year?**
 - What specifically would it take for you to make space in your life to do so?
4. When you have struggled with creating an on-going rhythm of spiritual practices, what has made it hard? Scheduling? Logistics? Lack of interest? Other?
 - What can you do to overcome those barriers?
5. What practice(s) (solitude, silence, Sabbath) could our Community Group commit to trying this month?
 - How can we accomplish this together (see attached 30 Day Sabbath Experiment)?

Praying for One Another

- Thank God that He gives us a day of rest each week. Pray that we would make sure we take a Sabbath each week.
- Pray that God would guide us this year as we follow Him.
- Pray that God would meet us as we try to “slow down” this year.

Sabbath: A 30 Day Experiment

“You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.”
- John Ortberg in *“The Life You’ve Always Wanted”*

The Experiment

This experiment involves three commitments/practices:

1. Resting at least 8 hours per night (time adaptable to season of life)
2. Taking one full Sabbath day a week.
3. Journaling 10-15 minutes a day about your experiences.

FAQs

*** What can or can’t I do on the Sabbath?**

Good question! Unfortunately, there is no infallible answer. Part of this experience will be for you to wrestle with the concept of Sabbath. In general, your Sabbath should be a day of rest for you. Your activities should be replenishing.

*** Do naps count?**

The idea of this is to get at least eight consecutive hours of sleep in each 24-hour period. Naps are wonderful, however!

*** What do I journal about?**

In general, you want to keep a running record of how restfulness is affecting you. Some other creative ideas:

- Pick a character quality, and track it. E.g., “Am I becoming more patient with others as I rest?”
- Create a questionnaire and give it to some people who know you well both before and after the 30-day experience. What changes have they seen in you?
- Read a book on rest during the month. *“Sabbath Keeping: Finding Freedom In The Rhythms Of Rest,”* by Lynne M. Baab and chapter five in *“The Life You’ve Always Wanted”* are great resources. Journal about what you are learning as you read.
- Read and meditate on specific scripture passages regarding rest (e.g., Exodus 20:8-11; Genesis 1:1-2:2; Psalm 62; Matthew 11:25-30). Write down what you’re learning.