

Sleep Debts and Play Deficits

On Sunday, we continued our sermon series based on Brené Brown's book *The Gifts of Imperfection*. We focused on Guideposts 6 and 7: Cultivating Play and Rest . . . by letting go of exhaustion as a status symbol and productivity as self-worth.

1. Warm-up Question: When you were a child, what was your favorite play activity?
2. Read Matthew 15:21-28. When people focus on this Gospel story, it's usually to wrestle with why Jesus was so reluctant to heal this woman's daughter and how she responded to Jesus' reluctance. Most people believe Jesus was testing the woman's faith. Through her faith and perseverance, she got her miracle. How do you feel about that interpretation? Does it make sense to you? Does anyone see it differently?
3. On Sunday we focused on another, equally important, aspect of this Gospel story. The text tells us that "Jesus left Galilee and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon" with his disciples. That means Jesus left his homeland (where he was called to minister to "the lost sheep of Israel") and went out of country to Tyre and Sidon, two beautiful cities located on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, far away from the people he was called to minister to. For Jesus and his disciples, this was a "get away," a time to rest and renew, a beach vacation!
 - a. Most of us have probably never pictured Jesus on vacation. The way Jesus is presented in many churches, we often get the impression that he was all work, no play. What do you imagine Jesus and his disciples may have done during their time in Tyre and Sidon? How does it make you feel to picture Jesus vacationing?
 - b. Many times in the Gospels we see Jesus deliberately striking a healthy balance between work and play. Mark 6:30 tells us about another time when, "The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, 'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest for a while. . . . And they went away in a boat. . . .'" Given the urgency of Jesus' mission – literally, to save the world – why do you think he took so much time for rest and recreation?
 - c. In Luke 7:33, Jesus said to his critics, "John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man has come to you eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'" Jeff said, "Clearly Jesus loved good food, good wine, good company, and good times." How does that sit with you? Imagine Jesus at a dinner party. Describe how you picture him conducting himself.
 - d. In Luke 6:41, Jesus said, "A disciple . . . who is fully qualified will be like the teacher." If Jesus was careful to strike a healthy balance between doing and being, we should do the same. It's part of our discipleship. How are you doing in this aspect of your discipleship? Do you feel you're allocating enough time for play and rest? Explain your answer.

4. In his book “Pure Pleasure,” Gary Thomas tells about seeing a group of 10-year-old girls celebrating a birthday at McDonalds. They were the perfect picture of “sheer, unadulterated happiness.” He found himself thinking about how much pleasure it gave God to see these girls having so much fun, like a parent watching their children on Christmas morning. In fact, in Matthew 7:11, Jesus makes the same analogy.
 - a. Has it ever occurred to you that you give God pleasure when you experience pleasure? How do you think it makes God feel when you fail to truly relish the gift of life?
 - b. Describe a time recently when you experienced so much delight, it probably gave God great delight.
 - c. Is it a sin not to have fun?
 - d. The Westminster Shorter Catechism says “the chief end of humans” is “to glorify God and enjoy God forever.” Do you agree? Are those really the two most important things we’re supposed to do?
 - e. Why is it so hard for us to achieve a healthy balance between doing and being?

5. Brené Brown says that much of our inability to relax and enjoy life comes from our felt-need to draw self-worth from “accomplishment and acquisition.” A Harvard study reached a similar conclusion: most of us have learned to see busyness as a measure of our success and value.
 - a. What are some practical ways we can achieve a better balance between doing and being? What works best for you?
 - b. Brené and her husband sat down and made two lists. The first list was to define “When things are going really well for me and my family, what does it look like?” The second list was of all the things they wanted to achieve and acquire. When they compared the two lists, they concluded they would be a lot happier if they focused more on the first list and less on the second. So they deliberately started simplifying their life. Do you feel you need to simplify? If so, how?
 - c. Elizabeth Canham says, “[Make time to] stop doing and start being. . . . Relinquishment lies at the heart of the Christian gospel and is a countercultural choice that hones our discipleship. If I let go of the assumption that my hard work will bring me all that I desire, I begin to look at the present moment, receive it with gratitude, and know what it asks of me. I learn when it’s time to rest, time to plan, time to play, time to wait, and time to act boldly.” Does this statement speak to you? If so, how or why?

“Come unto me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Matthew 11:28.

Jesus is calling? Will I respond?