

BELPRES CHURCH

More of Less

Exodus 16

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Well, good to see you. Happy time change Sunday. How many of you think this is stupid and we should get rid of it? Okay, there we go. All right. Some of you like it. Well, because you're here, I just want you to know you got up early. Even with the time change, you're here, you're worshiping. Your house in heaven is going to be much bigger. So it's true. Today's text comes from Exodus chapter 16, and it's on the screen there. Is that a little hard to read? That is a metaphor for many of our lives, right? Jampacked too many things to do, all good things, but too many of them all running together with no space between them. Too many hours at work. Too many activities for you or your kids. Too many relationships to manage, too much volunteer stuff that you're doing.

All good stuff, all good stuff. But like this picture, there's no spaces between them and everything just runs together and it's hard to make meaning out of it. It's the spaces between the words that make the words comprehensible. It's just the same in music. It's this little spaces between the notes that make it beautiful. Because if it was all just notes, then it would be a car horn honking. It would sound like that. Just one continuous horn. And if we live this way for too long, everything all crammed together, running together, if we live this way for too long, we are going to get depleted emotionally, physically, and spiritually. One time when our kids were toddlers, we took them to the beach and the first day we just had all kinds of stuff that we were doing and all kinds of activities. And by that night, my daughter, who was three at the time, was so exhausted, she started crying and running around in a circle saying, "I'm freaking out. Somebody put me down."

She meant put her to bed, right? Now she'd had a full day of really good stuff. Just too many things, too much of it. And if we have too many things in our lives, we're going to start freaking out and someone's going to have to put us down, which is why we are in a sermon series about how Jesus restores us. And the biblical word for restore is Sabbath. And some of you may have grown up in churches where Sabbath was a bunch of rules

that you had to follow. That's not Sabbath. Sabbath is connecting with God, people who point us to Jesus and things we delight in to be restored to mental, emotional and spiritual strength. Whether you're depleted because of too many things to do or a health problem or a financial problem or a relationship problem, no matter what depletes us, Sabbath restores us.

And Sabbath should be three things. It should be restful, it should be delightful, which I'll talk about in a minute, and it should be holy. That is time where we connect with Jesus. It should be the best day of the week. In the Bible, God says, six days you shall work and one day, you shall rest. It's a rhythm, six and one, six and one. Work and rest. Work and rest. Like the spaces between words that helps us make meaning out of them and understand them. And without the spaces in our lives, we will get depleted. So let's look at that same text this time with spaces in it and the context is that God has through Moses led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and they're headed toward the promised land and they run out of food and it says the whole community grumbled against Moses.

"If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt. There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted. But you have brought out us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death." Kind of dramatic, don't you think? And weird, wasn't Egypt great? Oh, remember... Yeah, we were slaves. But other than that, Egypt was great. Then the Lord said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. On the sixth day, that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days." Then the next morning there was thin flakes like frost on the ground. When the Israelites saw it, they said, "What is it?" Moses said, "It's the bread the Lord has given you to eat. No one is to keep any of it until morning because God was going to provide it every day."

However, some of them paid no attention. They kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell, which is gross. On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much. Moses said, "Tomorrow is a day of Sabbath rest, save whatever is left and keep it until morning." So they saved it until morning and it did not stink or get maggots in it. Maggot free breakfast, always a plus. Moses said, "Because today is a Sabbath to the Lord. You will not find any of it on the ground today. Six days you are to gather it. But on the seventh day the Sabbath, there will not be any." Nevertheless, some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather it, but they found none. Then the Lord said to Moses, "How long will you refuse to keep my commands? Bear in mind, the Lord has given you the Sabbath. That is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days."

Notice the word give. Sabbath is a gift God is trying to give us. The people of Israel called the bread, manna, which is the Hebrew word for what is it? Because they didn't know what it was and it tasted like wafers made with honey. So God provides food every morning and on the sixth day he provides twice as much, so the next day, the Sabbath day, they can rest and have enough to eat. And he tells them, "Only collect what you

need." But some people try to collect more and hoard it, and the result is it gets maggots and it stinks. So sermon question, what are your maggots?

Where's your efforts to accumulate more and more hurting you? More and more work hours, more and more material possessions, more and more commitments, more and more activities. Where's that starting to stink and wreck your life? Not because those things are bad. They're good. The manna was good, but too much of it goes bad. A while back, a couple came to talk to me because they were having marriage problems, but they were having a hard time getting started. So I said, "Let me see if I can help. Let me take a few guesses and you can tell me how accurate I am." So I said, "Let me guess. You have a couple of kids and they're involved in a lot of activities that you think they need to be well-rounded and to get into college. And so you're constantly driving them all over the place and you're busy and they're busy."

And this couple at that point started to laugh. And so I kept going and I said, "You haven't had a date night and you can't remember when and you can't remember at all when the last time was that you two had a meaningful conversation and you're frustrated that you feel badly about this because everyone around you is telling you that you are living the dream." How did I do? And they were both laughing and the guy said, "Oh, man, I had hoped we'd be more original than that." And I said, "Well, for all the theological talk about original sin, I've never seen one yet. They've all been done before." Now all of those things are good things, but too many of them become destructive. And we don't have to clear our calendars completely, to have Sabbath, we don't have to get rid of everything on our calendars, just some things so that we can have space in our lives for God, meaningful relationships and things that restore us.

Otherwise, what we get into is diminishing returns. Because the more tired we get, the harder we work for fewer and fewer results. And that's why when the Israelites go out to gather the manna on the seventh day, the Sabbath, that's why they don't get anything. It's diminishing returns. And as we've been saying throughout this whole series, the key to being able to have Sabbath is to trust that Jesus will provide what we need. The Israelites didn't trust God to provide, so they hoarded the manna and they tried to gather it on the Sabbath day.

We don't trust Jesus to provide for us. So we don't trust, for instance, Jesus to provide if we don't work all the time, and if we observe Sabbath and limit our work hours. Well, then maybe we won't rise up the corporate ladder or get into the college that we're hoping for or we don't trust that we'll still be liked even if we don't say yes to every single thing we're asked to do. But the point of this text is God will provide what we need. Maybe not always what we want, though often lots of that too. But certainly what we need. And just incidentally, parenthetically, one of the best ways to become convinced that God provides is to follow the biblical command to tithe, give 10% of our income to the faith community we're part of. Because when we do that, we see that God provides

and we discover we can be happy with less than we thought we needed, both of which are liberating.

Jesus provides. In the New Testament, Jesus refers to this passage when he says, "Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness as it is written. He gave them bread from heaven to eat. I am the bread of life." Jesus is born in Bethlehem, which means the house of bread. At the Last Supper, he says, "This bread is my body given for you." Jesus is what sustains us. Jesus is our manna, he provides. And when we trust that, then we don't feel like we have to constantly be working to secure our own futures and we can rest in the all-sufficiency of Jesus. Because sometimes less is more. In fact, often, less is more. More joy, more peace, more rest, more hope, better relationships.

Often less is more. When I was writing my dissertation for my PhD, I remember after I turned in the first chapter of the dissertation, my advisor gave it back to me the next day and he said, "Say everything you say in this chapter, but do it in half the number of pages, cut it in half." So I worked another couple of weeks and I cut it in half and I handed it in to him again and he said, "What do you think?" And I said, "It's the most elegant thing I've ever written." And he said, "Scott, it's always better, shorter." Okay, he was an atheist, that was the best preaching advice I ever got. It's always better, shorter. Amen, right? 20-minute sermon, way better than a 45-minute sermon. Less is often more. More joy, more peace, more hope. Less is often more. And more is often less because it turns into maggots.

We get stressed, burnout, decreasing creativity, broken relationships, on and on and on. So practically, practically, how do we begin? What will help us to cut some things out of our schedule? How do we do that? Because the pressure is to just keep adding to the calendar. Well, I'll give a couple suggestions that maybe can help to cut stuff out. First is remember this, the need is not always the call. The need is not always the call. Sometimes it is. God does call us to do things. Here in this church, we hope that you are involved in this church volunteering in some way in some things, but not everything. Not everything. So ask Jesus, "What things do you want me to do? And more importantly, Jesus, what are the things I'm doing that you don't want me to do?" Second, know when good enough is good enough. Our east side culture fuels perfectionism, right?

It tells us to be perfectionists. And that makes us busy because we work really hard on things that we shouldn't be working really hard on. So when is good enough, good enough, right? In our culture, like say you're having some people over for dinner, you feel all this pressure to clean the house and have like five portion for the meal. No, often a can of soup and a dirty house is all you need. Now, some things we do need to do with excellence, but not everything. And often what we think we need, the A on is not the same thing that God thinks we need the A on. You're having people over for dinner, God wants us to get an A on the relationships and a C minus on the clean house. I've shared

with some of you before that one of the prayers I pray, is an adaptation of the serenity prayer.

Serenity prayer; God grant me the serenity to accept what I can't change, courage to change what I can and the wisdom to know the difference. My version of that prayer is, God, grant me the energy to do with excellence, what must be done with excellence? Courage to half-bake what I should half-bake. And you can use a different phrase there if you want, and the wisdom to know the difference. When is good enough, good enough. Third, calendar, the most important things first. Time with God, time with friends, date nights if you're married, Sabbath day. And if you can't figure out how to have a whole day, ask God to show you. Start with half a day and then ask God to show you what you can cut out so you can have a whole day of Sabbath rest. It's the old analogy that if you have big rocks, pebbles and sand and you're trying to put them in a jar, if you put the pebbles and the sand in first, the big rocks won't fit.

But if you put the big rocks in first, the pebble and the sand will fill in the spaces between the big rocks. Put the big rocks in your calendar first. Let everything else kind of fill in the gaps so you're getting the most important things done first. And then fourth, limit screen time. Social media, news, television, right? A little bit of it is fine, but the data's really clear. It's contributing to anxiety and depression. Plus it is a massive waste of time. Your phone will show you how much time you've spent on it and how much time you spent on each app. And if you look at that... When I look at that, I am shocked how much time I can waste scrolling social media, things like that, and it doesn't restore us. So put a limit on that and then use that time to Sabbath.

So those are some ways that you can go through your schedule. We can go through our schedules and begin to pull some things out. I don't need to do this. I don't need to do this, this I need to do, but not that. And then once you have created that space for Sabbath, well then what do you do with it? Well, that's what we've been talking about this whole sermon series. And as we've said, we're building into this one building block at a time. And last week, the action step was on your Sabbath, take some time and just rest. This week's action step is to delight. To delight, Sabbath should be restful, holy and delightful.

It should lead to joy. Today's text said that the manna tasted like wafers made with honey. It didn't say that manna tasted like three day old fish or liver, right? Tasted like honey, which is sweet. Sabbath, delight is part of Sabbath. In fact, depending on how you count, the Israelites held six feasts every year, but only one fast a year. That's a ratio of six feasts to one fast, 6:1, 6:1. Sounds familiar, right? Like the rhythm of Sabbath rest. God says to the Israelites to use a portion of their money to buy cattle, sheep, wine or other strong drink. I'm not sure what that would be. Whiskey or something like that, I don't know. Or anything you wish, then you and your household shall eat there in the

presence of the Lord your God and rejoice. In other words, Presbyterians, it's party time, which is a total contradiction in terms, but it's still a command.

Now, God's not saying be materialistic or abuse alcohol. What he's saying is celebrate, delight. That's part of Sabbath. We're currently in the season of Lent, which is 40 days of spiritual preparation before Easter. And traditionally, people give something up for Lent, chocolate, candy, something like that. But some of you know that during Lent, Sundays are feast days. So whatever you gave up for Lent, you can have on Sundays. And whenever I tell people this, they say, "No, that's cheating." No, it's not cheating. It's the way it's supposed to be, because every Sunday is a mini Easter, even in Lent where we celebrate that Jesus conquered death and sin by his resurrection. So if you gave up chocolate this year for Lent, go home today, eat a chocolate cake, follow it up with chocolate ice cream, and then polish it off with a Snickers. Otherwise, you're sinning.

Okay?

Preach it.

Yeah, celebrate, delight. And traditionally, there've been a number of things that religious leaders in Bible times would recommend for people to do to bring delight to the Sabbath. Feasting or going out to eat so you don't have to cook. Community, have a meal with people you love. In Pastor Sergio's words, "Waste time with people that you enjoy." Make love with your spouse. Religious leaders in Bible time said, "Married couples should make love every Sabbath day." And some of you just got really interested in Sabbath and some of you just woke up from the time change thing. Get out in nature, a walk, a hike, play. Sabbath was made for... Play games, basketball, karaoke, bowling, baseball, something. Create art or music, reconnect with a friend or family member. Those are just some ways to delight during the Sabbath.

Create space in your schedule so your life isn't a bunch of things strung together with no space in between. So there's time to connect with God and others and things that bring you delight, it will restore you. A number of years ago as a church, we did a capital campaign. Some of you were here then, others of you weren't to build the upper campus to start Jubilee REACH here in Bellevue that works with under-resourced communities and the Center for Champions in Rwanda for street kids. And that capital campaign helped me with Sabbath a little bit in two ways. The first was it helped me trust Jesus better, going through that process. During that campaign, my wife's grandmother died and the memorial was on the same day that we were having a dinner for our ministry and financial leaders. And we needed to raise a significant amount of the money at that dinner. So hugely important dinner.

And my wife's family asked me to do the memorial for Christina's grandmother on that same day, which meant we'd have to fly down to the Bay Area, do the memorial and fly back in time for the dinner. And there was a bunch of stuff, I had preparations I needed

to be making that day for the dinner that night, on and on. Plus, I have bad airport luck. My flights are always delayed. So what if our flight was delayed getting back? We missed the dinner. I had a significant role in that dinner. So it all made me nervous until a wise person in this church said, "Scott, what's more important? Showing Jesus love to your in-laws or your success as a fundraiser?" Like, okay, well, if you put it that way. So I started to pray the prayer, "Jesus, I'm going to put this in your hands and I'm going to trust that if we don't get back in time or we don't raise enough money or whatever, I'm going to trust you that you know what is best. I'm going to put this in your hands."

I also didn't do a bunch of the preparations I thought I had to do for that dinner. And I just said, good enough is going to have to be good enough. And as I started to pray that and let go of those things, I could feel the stress kind of bleeding away from me. And we went down, I did the memorial. I put the most important thing first, came back, did the dinner. And I remember at that dinner feeling joy and delight and having fun because I had put the outcome in Jesus' hands and was able to just enjoy it and experience delight during that dinner.

The other way that campaign helped me with Sabbath was it showed me that less really is often more. My wife and I dug deep to try to give as much money as we could to that campaign. It was a three-year giving cycle. We gave everything in those three years that we would've saved for college or retirement. We gave to that campaign. We saved money on food with meals like a tofu spaghetti we had once. That was not a way that the campaign blessed us. But one of the things we also did was fewer trips to California to visit our friends and my wife's family so we could give that money to the campaign instead and instead do vacations... Staycations here.

That turned out to be a huge blessing. Pastor Rich Leatherberry here has this saying where he'll say, "A visit is different than a vacation." That is really true, isn't it? A visit is different than a vacation. And a lot of my vacation was taken up with visits to California to see friends and Christina's family. Now, I love my wife's family. I won the in-law lottery. They are awesome, but it's still a visit. And I'd cram my schedule full to see all of the friends I could possibly see until Christina showed me correctly that I was making everyone miserable, making us so busy in California, I had to pick a few people and just stick with them and let the others go. So our trips to California weren't so frantic.

I also discovered that staying here for vacation was often more restful than travel, especially with kids because travel is hard. So we still did some visits, just fewer of them. And instead of going somewhere every vacation, I experienced the delight of just staying here and sitting on my porch and reading a book, and then maybe going for a swim in Lake Washington, the joy of unstructured, unplanned time just here rather than going somewhere all the time with kids. And to me, that was more restful. To me, it was more delightful. To me, it was more joyful. I learned that Jesus would provide. And I learned that less is often more. There is such a thing as too much. And often what we need more

of is less. We need more, less in our lives. So this week, create some space for you to delight in something to celebrate and trust that Jesus will provide even if you don't do everything at an A plus level and discover how much more, less really is.

So Jesus, help us to do this. It's not easy. Our culture wants to put stuff on our calendars all the time, and we have all kinds of pressures and all kinds of demands. But Lord, through your Holy Spirit, as we review what's on our calendars this week and the weeks ahead, show us what we can cut out. Show us what you're not asking us to do and what you are asking us to do. Lord, help us to create some space and in that space, help us to encounter you and help us to celebrate and delight. Lord, use that space to lift our spirits. Use that space to help us trade in what is burdening us for your joy and your celebration and your delight. We ask this in your name, Jesus. Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- Given the miraculous escape from Egypt and the parting of the Red Sea (Exodus 13), how do you account for the people complaining so soon?
- What are God's various instructions for gathering the manna, and what does each one say about the kind of relationship God desires we have with him?
- Why do you think it is so important to God that we observe the sabbath?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- Scott gave several recommendations for creating margin in our lives so that we can delight in sabbath. Reflecting on your own life, what are the "big rocks" that God has helped you identify as most important? Does your actual calendar reflect that accurately or are there still some changes you can make?
- As you think about this week's building block, delight, what are some things that you would like to practice *adding* to your sabbath to celebrate and enjoy God's gift to us of a sabbath day?

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.

This week's Sabbath practice: DELIGHT

What's one thing you can add to Sabbath that you can delight in?

- Play, play, play. Karaoke, dance, games, hike.
- Reach out to someone: call an old friend, parents, grandparents or grandchildren.
- Gather around a slow cooked meal, in community or alone. Some need community, some who have extensive community need to spend some time alone.