

May 22, 2011 - Everyday Recreation

We are beginning a new series today and some of you may have seen that in your Bulletin or on Facebook or whatever. Our new series is titled "Everyday God". There may be some who when they saw that were a little skeptical about that title and a little unsure about what that meant and maybe some of you were a little worried that we were going to insinuate that Jesus was just another everyday guy, just another guy like Confucius, or Ghandi or the Dali Lama. Or that our God is just another God like Zeus or Poseidon or Thor, or something like that. For any of you who had those concerns, let me assure you that we're not going to any of those places and we're not going to insinuate any of those things, because we don't believe those things are true. We believe that our God is a unique God and is unlike anything else that there is in the Universe and we believe that Jesus is different than anyone else who has ever walked the face of this earth. If this series was going to be about God and who He is and His nature and how He acts, we probably would have titled it something like 'Excellent God' or 'Exceptional God' or 'Extraordinary God' and that would have been a title for our series. That might be a good series for us to do sometime. This series, however, is all about the extraordinary way that an extraordinary God connects with people in some of the most ordinary places and moments of life. So, that's what we're going to be looking at over the next several weeks in our time together on Sunday morning.

I think sometimes we restrict God or we think that God somehow restricts Himself to the 'churchy' activities in life. I did some math and I looked at my week and thought, well how much of my week is involved in those 'churchy' activities. I get here most Sunday mornings before most of you, there's a few who beat me here and I'm usually one of the last few to leave and we have our Group on Sunday night, and we do that and we come on Wednesday night and we hang around and visit for a little bit after that. Generously, I added up all those times and I figured putting those 'churchy' times together, I put in probably, eight, maybe ten hours a week if I'm really going at it. I thought of that in the shape of my whole week and I thought, "you know, that doesn't add up to a whole lot." And I thought "well I can add in my personal prayer time and maybe you do some reading of the Bible at home and maybe you do some extra fellowship with people from Church here and there so you can add that into the mix a little bit. But when you break it down, most of us spend less time, per day, on average, doing Church activities than we spend doing housework, or making and eating our meals, or even on personal hygiene or primping. We definitely spend a lot more time in work and sleep than we do in our 'churchy' activities in a given week. Most of us probably spend more time, per day, on average, on leisure activities and hobbies, watching T.V. and playing video games on our computers. And I'm not saying all that to make you feel miserable or guilt you into spending more time doing 'churchy' stuff every week, it's simply to point out that if those 8 to 10 hours per week are the only time that God connects with your life, then Houston, we have a problem. When I look at those numbers and when I think of that, I realize that, I don't feel guilty about that, I feel a little depressed by that, because when I look at those numbers I realize that going by those numbers, God is directly connected to my life for about 6% of my week. If that were true, that means the other 94% of my week I'm all on my own and I don't like that scenario and

so, over the next several weeks, what we want to do is try and see how God connects with us in that other 94%.

We say that we know that God isn't just involved in the 'churchy' stuff, God is with us everywhere, all of the time, wherever we go. God is always with us and we have that concept in our minds but sometimes when we think of that we think of it more like God is up there somewhere high above, watching down and every now and then when we're doing something really spiritual He'll swoop down a little closer and be a little nearer. Or we have this picture that God is with us but it's kind of like the motorcycle and the side-car and God is always with us in the side-car of the motorcycle but we're driving the motorcycle, going everywhere and He's just kind of tagging along and every now and then when we do something really spiritual He will get out and help and lend a hand. But Jesus has taught us that He is someone who is right in the very middle of things.

We just finished a series on Mark and we talked about how Mark wrote and he wanted to put us right into the middle of his story but the truth is, Jesus came down and went right in the middle of the story, of your story. You see, Jesus came to earth and lived among us. He came to show us who God is and partly that meant teaching and preaching and doing miracles and the Last Supper and the crucifixion and the empty tomb and part of that is how He showed God, among us and who God is but it also meant growing up in a family. It meant going to weddings. It meant hanging out with His friends. He went visiting people's houses for supper. It meant walking around town with His friends. It meant going fishing. It meant doing all that ordinary every day stuff.

Jesus says in John, Chapter 10: "The thief comes to kill, to steal and destroy. But I have come that they may have life and have it to the full." The KJV says "have it more abundantly". And the New Living says "to give them a rich and satisfying life."

You see, God designed life and He designed it to function best when He is involved in every piece of it. So I suggest to you this morning that the best way to vacuum your house, involves God. And the best way to do your job, involves God. The best way to fly a kite, involves God. The best way to scrapbook, involves God. The best way to watch your kids play soccer, involves God. The best way to manage your finances, involves God. The best way to do your homework, involves God. The best way to, fill in the blank, involves God. Which means, anytime we try to do something without God's involvement, we are short-changing ourselves. We are preventing ourselves from experiencing the best that that activity was designed to offer us.

So, for the next several weeks, we're going to look at how God is involved with some pretty ordinary parts of life. Everyday things. And we're going to ask the question, "What does God's involvement in that area of our life, what difference does that make?"

Since it is the long weekend I thought "What better place to start, in ordinary places for God to

be involved in our life than everyday recreation. Now somebody will say “recreation is not really a spiritual topic, it has nothing to do with God.” But, I beg to differ and I’ll tell you why in just a second. Others may say, and you might be thinking this yourself “Oh great! Here it comes. Here’s the sermon, point 1. Anytime you spend on recreation would have been better spent reading your Bible or volunteering at a soup kitchen. Point number 2. Any money you spend on recreation would have been better spent on relief work in Haiti or Honduras.” But that is not where we are going this morning either.

For a long time I think a lot of us misunderstood God’s opinion of recreation. I want you to just, in your mind, quickly make a list of the top 10 spiritual activities to do out there. I’ll give you a second to do that. Top 10 spiritual things to do. I’m going to guess a lot of you came up with things like worship; praying; reading your bible; teaching; or preaching or something like that; evangelism; on the top 10 spiritual things on the list to do. Some of you may have come up with giving; serving; maybe even hospitality and I’m not sure what you came up with for 9 and 10. But I’m pretty sure that most of you, especially if you hadn’t know where we’re going this morning, most of you probably wouldn’t put recreation or resting, on your list of Top 10 spiritual things. Probably not in your top 20, maybe not in your top 100, maybe not on any list of spiritual activities, would you have put recreation or resting or anything like that. You see, a lot of us have inherited the idea that hard work is Godly. And not working is un-Godly. And part of this is thanks to the idea that came out of the reformation back in the 16th Century. The Catholic church at that time, had said “you do good things to earn your salvation”. And the reformers came along and said “No, that’s not right, we are saved by grace and so we are saved and then we do good things because we have been saved.” And that idea kind of progressed and evolved a little bit and so, people began to think that doing good things and doing good work is a sign that you have been saved. And so, good works evolved into being a good worker and a hard worker and that evolved into this idea that the harder you work, the more likely it is that you are one of the saved. And so, at the beginning of the 20th Century, this whole concept was dubbed “The Protestant Work Ethic”. And it was this idea that work is Godly and Godly people work and they work a lot and they work hard. Part of this is also thanks to our culture. We live in a culture that values two things: Production and Acquisition. We value people, we place a high value on those who make great things or make a great number of things. And honour is given to those who can acquire great things or who can acquire a great number of things. These are the goals that our society lifts up to us and says “what you need to do is you need to work hard so you can get.” “What you need is to work hard so you can have.” And between those two things we have come to this idea that work is Godly and not working is un-Godly. Now, work has it’s place and work has it’s value and God calls us to be good workers. Paul says “whatever you do, do your work with all of your heart.” We’re going to get into all that next week. But before God called people to work, He invited them to rest.

Let’s go back to the very beginning. The very beginning we have the story of the creation of everything. And Genesis 1 maps it out for us in seven days. In the first day God separated day and the night. Second day, He separated the sky from the water. The third day He made

dry land and plants. The fourth day, He made the sun and the moon and the stars. The fifth day, He made all the birds of the air and the fish. The sixth day, He made all the land animals and people and on the seventh day, Genesis said “God rested.” Genesis, Chapter 2:1-3: “Creation of the heavens and the earth everything was completed, on the seventh day, God finished His work of creation, so He rested from all His work. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it Holy because it was the day when He rested from all His work of creation.”

Now, as you read that story, you will notice something about each of these days. The first five days, God creates and then He stops and He looked at the work He had done and God said “That’s good.” And by good, He didn’t mean that’s just ‘good’, He meant that’s right, that fits, that works. And on day six God creates people and He says “That’s not only good that’s very good.” And then He comes to day seven, and God rests. And He doesn’t say “that’s good”. He doesn’t say “that’s very good.” God says “that’s holy”, this is a holy thing. This is a thing set apart. And the first thing the bible calls holy is ‘resting’. God is serious about resting. So serious that He made this idea of the Sabbath one of the Ten Commandments. God said there are ten things that, this is the list of the most important things you need to do. If you want to live life the best way that you can possibly live it, here are the ten things, the top of the list I want you to do and one of those things God says is “I want you to have a Sabbath. I want you to have a day of rest and keep it holy and keep it set apart.” The Ten Commandments are listed in two different places, once in Exodus and once in Deuteronomy. The lists are almost exactly the same. This is the commandment for the Sabbath from Deuteronomy:

“Observe the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy as the Lord God has commanded you. You have six days each week for your ordinary week, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest, dedicated to the Lord your God. On that day, no one in your house may do any work. This included you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants. Your oxen, your donkey, and any livestock and any foreigners living among you.”

You see, God was so serious about this Sabbath day he said “On the Sabbath day, I don’t want anyone working. Everyone is going to rest, even the servants are going to rest. Even if you have a foreigner who is not a Jew who is visiting at your house, you can’t make him work and do all the work you would do if you could do, because it’s the Sabbath. No, foreigners you rest too. This is serious. Everyone will take a day of rest.

The passages go on and here they diverge a little bit. The Exodus passage says:

“For six days the Lord has made the earth, the heavens and the sea and everything in them, but on the seventh day, He rested. That’s why the Lord blessed the Sabbath and set it apart as holy.”

So Exodus said “God rested” and you are made in God’s image and therefore, you shall rest. Deuteronomy says “remember that you were once slaves in Egypt but the Lord your God brought you out with His strong hand and powerful arm. That is why the Lord your God has

commanded you to rest on the Sabbath day.” Deuteronomy says “you rest on this day to remember that God has freed you.”

And so, even to this very day, Jews when they celebrate the Sabbath will light two candles, one for the Exodus passage, one for the Deuteronomy passage and the Sabbath is there to remind them that God rested and you are created in God’s image, so you shall rest. And that God has freed you and so you will set this day aside to remember that.

In Exodus 31 the Israelites are in the wilderness and they’re walking around and God is feeding them by quail at night and manna that appears in the morning and God is so serious about resting that He said “On the eve of the Sabbath I’ll make sure that the manna you collect then doesn’t spoil the next day like it does all the rest of the week, it will last you two days, because this is a day set aside for rest.” You may be surprised to hear this, here is what God says about the Sabbath in Exodus 31:

“Anyone who desecrates it, must be put to death. Anyone who works on that day will be cut off from the community. Anyone who works on the Sabbath must be put to death.”

That shocks me a little bit, that God would take this day of rest, quite so seriously. Leviticus gives a long list of these are the special days, the festivals the special times of year that God wants His people to celebrate and at the very top of the list in Leviticus, Chapter 23, the Sabbath. You know what, the Sabbath comes ahead of things like the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread; the Celebration of First Harvest; the Festival of Harvest; the Festival of Trumpet; the Day of Atonement; the Festival of Shelters, all of these other great festivals and feasts that we read about in the Bible and God says, Number 1; Sabbath. Have a day of rest.

And it’s not just the Jews and the Old Testament. In the New Testament, God continues to be serious about resting. We went through this story a month or so ago. The disciples had been out teaching and preaching and they came back to Jesus and the people were coming and they didn’t even have a chance to eat and Jesus says “Come with me, by yourself to a quiet place, let’s get some rest.”

Later, in Matthew, Chapter 11, Jesus says: “Come to me all you are weary and carry heavy burdens, I will give you rest. Take my yolk upon you. Let me teach you because I am humble and gentle in heart and you will find rest for your soul. My yolk is easy to bear and the burden I give you is light.”

God is serious about us resting. So what does all that mean. Well, it doesn’t mean that we all become zombie couch potatoes, who eat nachos and play video games all day. That’s not what we’re talking about here. It’s something different than that, something more than that. It simply means that, In God’s design for life, there is time set aside for rest and recreation. Now, some of you may think that I’m making a big leap to go from Sabbath rest to recreation,

but I don't think it's a leap at all. You see we just need to clarify and redefine our terminology. You see, I think we often times associate recreation with leisure activities. I think they are two very different things. You see, a leisure activity is something that we go out and we do in an attempt to relax and have fun. And there's nothing wrong with that. But recreation is something that re-creates us. Something that takes us back to our original state of being. It revives us. It refreshes us. And we've all likely discovered some things that re-create us to one degree or another, but they are all limited and they are short-lived. Full re-creation can only be found in one place. The same place creation occurs. In Genesis, Chapter 2, it says:

“The Lord God formed man from the dust in the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.”

You see, re-creation occurs when we set aside time to rest and allow God to breathe new life back into us. It's spiritual CPR. It's the kind of stuff that at those moments that David was writing about when he said these famous words:

“The Lord is my Shepherd I have all I need. He let's me rest in green meadows. He leads me beside peaceful streams. He renews my strength. He guides me along right paths and brings honour to His name.”

And that re-creation is something that we all long for. Something we all need. Something we search for in all sorts of places. I looked at this list of leisure activities that Canadians participate in and we are looking a lot of places for things that are going to renew us and refresh us and relax us and re-energize us. But, the problem lies in the fact that, as I try and do all of these things, I make it much more difficult to find time to rest in God. Have you had that experience? Has it been hard to find time to just rest. We went on a vacation not long ago to Vancouver and I came back and many of you asked how my vacation was and I told you all the same thing, it was good, but I'm exhausted. And every one of you said one of two things. You either said “Yeah! That's how vacations always go.” Or, the classic “you need a vacation from your vacation.” And that tells me that you have all had the same experience that I had. We went to Vancouver and in one week, this is kind of the path that we went. We put on almost 1,000 kilometres and never left the City. We went to a lot of places. We saw a lot of people. I led worship one Sunday. I preached another Sunday. And we were just all over the place, busy, going. We were up early and out late. And I came back and I was just exhausted. And the more that I try and find things to refresh me, the less time I have to rest. And it's not just leisure activities and vacations, it's work and school and family and housework and yard work and kids, sports and grocery shopping and oil changes and church activities and my schedule is so full that I find I have no time to rest. And the bottom line is, that instead of feeling more restful from any of these things, I feel restless.

I have a broken clock. Not on my wall. Actually I do have a broken clock on my wall as well, but I have a broken clock inside of me and my broken clock doesn't allow me to sleep the way I would like it to. Because every night when I go to bed and I want to go to sleep, my

broken clock keeps me awake. I don't have restless leg syndrome; I have restless mind syndrome and I lay in bed and I'm not relaxed, I'm stressed, I'm wound up, I'm agitated, I'm tense. Some of you have that problem. Some of you, as soon as your head hit's the pillow you go to sleep. Then you wake up at 4:00 a.m. and can't go back to sleep because of the same thing. We are a restless people and we are looking for rest someplace but we can never find it.

And so, as I was going through this lesson this week and I was thinking about these things, I thought "yes, we need to find a place of rest, but, the thing that irks me as I read this story and I thought back to the Creation story and God on the seventh day resting, was, I read this verse and the highlighted words just jumped out at me: "So the creation of the heavens and the earth and everything in them was completed and on the seventh day, God had finished His work of creation, so He rested from all of this work." And I thought "Oh, that's great for Him cause He's finished, I'm never finished." And that's why I never rest, cause I'm never finished. There's not a week goes by that Friday doesn't come along and I leave the office on Friday afternoon thinking "I'm not finished yet, there's still books that I wanted to read, there's projects that I wanted to work on, there's people that I wanted to call, or visit, there's things that I wanted to do, but my week is done and I'm not finished. And then I go home and I'm not finished there either, because my wife has a list of things and I never get that one finished and even if I did, I have my own list of things that I'd like to do and I never get that finished." And I'm busy doing all these things and I never get finished and then I sit down and I think "You know what, there's my kids, I never get to spend the time I want with them. I'm never finished that job. And I never feel finished and I think "this is unfair, how can I possibly rest if I'm never finished."

I think of the playoffs. And you pick your sport, hockey, basketball, baseball or whatever it is and almost without fail there's a big game and there's a big comeback and they've rally hard and they win, triple overtime or whatever, this big, big, win, and afterwards they interview the coach and the coach says "Good win for us, the guys played hard. We're going home tonight and tomorrow start preparing for the next game." And that's how I feel. I'm never, never, finished. And I can't afford to slow down or take time off because that's just going to get me further behind. And for a long time that irked me. I felt like these guys. I'm running for the finish line but the people holding the finish line tape are running ahead of me and so I can never quite catch up to it and I realized that the fact that I'm never finished all my work is the very reason that God said "You HAVE TO stop and rest. If you wait till you're done you'll never get there and I didn't design you to run your entire life without taking a rest, I designed you to pause regularly and rest in Me." I won't be finished everything on my own. And that's why God is so serious about rest. Because when we rest in God, not only do we recharge and refresh and re-create, but we get reminded of what we are here for.

There's a movie called Chariots of Fire that came out a long time ago, back in the 80's. and it tells of these two British athletes who were training for the 1924 Olympics. The first one, his name was Harold Abrams and he was a driven guy. He practiced all the time and he got private trainers and he just worked so hard and so hard and so hard and at one point someone

asked him “why are you so driven? Why do you train so hard? Why Harold?” And he said “Because I have ten seconds to justify my existence.” He’s trying to justify his existence by his hard work.

The other man in the story was Eric Little. And the crux of the movie was that the final race was on Sunday and Eric was a Christian man and he said “I’m not going to run on Sunday because Sunday is God’s day.” And everyone said “well you can make an exception” and Eric said “No, I’m not going to do it.” And he said “I don’t run to be the best. I don’t run to prove who I am.” He said “God made me fast and when I run, I feel His pleasure. And that’s what it’s about for me, it’s feeling God’s pleasure when I’m doing what He designed me to do. When I’m living like He wanted me to.” And when we rest in God we are reminded, we are refreshed and we are re-created and we remember that what we do, is what He created us to do and when we do that, we feel His pleasure, no matter what it is we’re doing.

God calls us to find rest in Him so that we can be re-created and go out and feel His pleasure in whatever else we do. And I thought, maybe that will sink in with someone, but then we’ll have a song and a prayer and then we’ll get up and it will be “I’ve got to talk to that person, I’ve got to talk to that person and I have lunch reservations and there’s people coming over.” No, we must rest. And so, for one I will remind you that after service there’s a prayer room in the back corner and it is a quiet place. And so, if you’re feeling like, I just need to go somewhere and hide away and rest with God for awhile, go there. But also, we’re going to give you three minutes and 30 some, seconds to rest. We’re going to play a song for you but you don’t have to sing, the words will be on the screen, all I want you to do for the next three and a half minutes is rest with God. It won’t be enough, but I’m hoping it will be a start for you and that you will feel that rest with God and you will be still and know that He is God and you will say “I need a little bit more of that, in my life. I need some ‘holy rest’ time in my week. Some time set aside just to be still with God. So, let us rest together.