**The Gathering**

 I hope this series and the encouragement in these lessons helps you think about the rhythms of your life and, hopefully, encourages you to make some changes to behaviors and attitudes in your life. During this lesson, we think together, through the Scriptures, that will lead us to be regular and weekly worshippers of our God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

 There has never been a time in my life where I had a choice to worship or not. Maybe a little in college, but if my girlfriend, who I ended up marrying, would go to church, I would go with her. We went on a bus in the middle of winter to a church in St Paul, Minnesota. It was cold, it was dark and the bus smelled of exhaust. When we got there, the worship wasn’t typically exciting, but it was a link to Jesus, to community and to Barb! My point is that I grew up worshipping weekly. That was established in me by my parents and my wife and I have established that in our home and family for our children, as well. It is the rhythm of our lives. I love that. I’m anchored, as are the people I love the most in the whole world. to God’s created rhythm of life.

 Genesis 1 leads us into a rhythm of work. God said, and it was made so. God named, and there was evening and morning and the number of the days. This is rhythm of work and production. Getting things done. We know this rhythm. It starts early in the morning, being driven toward the tasks of life, it leads us to the end of the day, when the mental list of tasks is finally set aside and we collapse in exhaustion. We drive our children with activity. We drive our families with activity. We drive our own souls and ourselves to the point of exhaustion. Sometimes, when I get up to lead worship, I see people who are so tired and worn out. That’s the rhythm of work.

 And there’s more. We have convinced ourselves that this rhythm is an end in itself. We define ourselves with the rhythm of work. We measure our productivity with the metrics of work: hours spent at work, salary, benefits, jobs completed. Our technology has even allowed the rhythm of work, when left unchecked, to infiltrate our lives through text messaging, checking e-mails and working remotely in an almost obsessive manner. How are your rhythms? How is your life going? Are you exhausted? Are you untethered? Or are you feeling empty?

 When the 7th day of creation dawned, the rhythm of Sabbath was established and the rhythm of work was interrupted. Genesis 2:1-3, “Thus, the heaven and the earth were completed in all their vast array. 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, because, on it, he rested from all the work of creating He had done.” God took a moment to rest and refresh and He set a rhythm of life for His entire creation, and, most especially, for the very top of His creation -- people. You and me. We need to interrupt work with Sabbath, with worship, and, when we don’t, the rhythm of work can quite literally kill us. We call it anxiety, stress, worry and the like, but, perhaps, it stems from living outside of the rhythm for which we were created.

 God, the Father, created us. Scripture tells us we were hand crafted. Scripture tells us that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. Scripture tells us that God knows us and, thus, what we need even better than we do. That means we are smaller than we think and God is bigger than we think.

 So, God calls us to a constant rhythm of work and rest. Work isn’t bad. Rest alone isn’t what we were created for. Author Eugene Peterson writes in his book , “Christ Plays in 10,000 Places” writes, “Work doesn’t take us away from God; it continues the work of God through us. Sabbath and work are not in opposition; Sabbath and work are integrated parts of an organic whole, either apart from the other is crippled.” It seems in our time that work has taken priority. But there’s a greater rhythm.

 God established the rhythm in Genesis 2 and then reestablishes it again in Exodus. **8**“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. **9**Six days you shall labor and do all your work, **10**but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. **11”**For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. God knew that His people had been enslaved for hundreds of years and He worked to make sure they remembered the Sabbath day. They had been slaves in Egypt and the Lord wanted to make sure they weren’t slaves again. The rhythm of a slave is work, work. But the rhythm of a child of God is to work and rest and to honor God in both.

 We are not slaves to work, we are children of God. When we break the string of workdays with a day of Sabbath and rest, then we are showing and affirming how we were created. The reality is that we serve the Lord and our identity is primarily in Him and not in our work. That’s a uniquely Christian thought.

 The Sabbath Day gives shape, also, to the worship in which we participate every week. Our worship has order to it that delivers God’s best. Typically, a worship service includes a gathering around God’s Word and around His Table. Worship is not a haphazard smorgasbord that somehow we choose this and that and thus have our appetites satisfied. The Scripture guides our worship and leads us to Jesus. Hebrews 4:12 reads, **12**For the word of God is alive and active.  Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” We gather together to confess our sins, to hear God’s word of forgiveness. After we have worked and worked, we are renewed by the rest of the gospel and the grace of God breathed out into us.

 The Sabbath gathers us in community and the table of the Lord, as well. We eat and drink throughout the week, but the Lord’s Supper is different. The menu is always the same, the company is always different. There are no reservations. There are no substitutions. But Christ comes down to forgive, to renew and to strengthen us. He is our God and we are His people. This covenant affirms and strengthens as we enjoy a brief Sabbath meal with our Lord and with our brothers and sisters in Christ. The rhythm…of hearing, speaking, eating restore our soul and remind us that we are not slaves to anyone or anything, but we belong to God. We are His people!

 Two quotes again from Eugene Peterson. The first one is, “If there is no Sabbath—no regular and commanded not-working, not talking -- we soon become totally absorbed in what we are doing and saying, and God’s work is either forgotten or marginalized.” How is your life going? No energy for anything but work? Always tired and lots of anxiety about your performance? The antidote to this illness is worship and Sabbath. Come into the presence of God, have your life lifted out of the mundane into the heavenly and let your whole self be renewed in the gospel of Jesus Christ. You were created for that.

 The second quote, “If we are serious about living well in God’s creation, we can start by clearing out the clutter of Sunday…” So much happens on Sunday that didn’t happen in years gone by. I remember living in rural Iowa for two years and the whole town shutting down after church. Finally, about 5:00, the theater would open up, but not much else. It was like a ghost town. A generation later, my wife and I, raising our own children, things were/are markedly different. Sunday is a busy day.

 When my children played competitive sports/club sports the draw of Sunday as a day of soccer or training was huge. My wife and I would look at the schedule and scrunch our brows and wonder what we would do with so many Sunday games. We always tried to have a realistic perspective. More than likely, our children would not be Olympians or professional athletes. So, we didn’t invest in it like they would be. More than likely our children would be practicing Christians for their entire lives. So we would invest in that. I used to get emotional when I would see my wife and daughter come to worship on Saturday night with dirty knees and mussed hair after a long day of soccer. I used to like to see my son sit with his mother and sister on Sunday morning after a huge football game the night before. We invest our lives in those things that are most important. I wonder if we get out of rhythm when Sundays and weekends are given to sports and not Sabbath? Are we better and are we raising better children because they are involved in so many activities? My wife and I decided that first things would be first and, so far, that has worked out. I will keep you apprised how it goes in the future. Weekly worship is the norm.

 What could you do to clear the clutter out of your Sunday? How would that help you in your life of faith? How would that help with the anxiety you have for family and children? How would regular worship help you bring godly values and behaviors back to your family? How would weekly worship engage you in the words, songs and prayers of eternity? These are all good things to kick around and think about in your own heart, as well as in your life group and family.

 God bless you and walk with you as you think about the rhythms of your life. The Lord of the universe created you unique. He knows you and loves you. He calls you to a life of regular worship and rest. Blessings to you as explore this topic in your group. Much love to you all!!