

Sunday, March 22, 2020

An Extended Sabbath Devotional

Good morning Westover Baptist Family,

As I said in my first email, we are living in unprecedented times. Leaders across the globe are trying to find the best solutions to meet the challenges of our current situation. Health officials are trying the best they can to “flatten the curve” and limit the spread of the coronavirus. Citizens across the country are encouraged to stay home and only go out if it is essential and completely necessary.

For some, staying home has been a nice way to catch up on reading or cleaning the house. Others have used this time to do yard work, play games with their children or go for long walks in the neighborhood. In fact, I can't remember seeing more people outside in the neighborhood running or walking, kids playing in the streets, and others walking their dogs. It reminds me of a time long ago before video games and TV.

This extra time to spend in leisure and outside is a blessing, a silver lining in these difficult times. As the recommendations to stay home don't seem to be changing within the next few weeks, what if we used this time as an extended Sabbath, an extra time to refrain from working and trying to change the world, and instead simply be. What if we used this time to relax, stay home and be still? What if we used this time to seek a more intimate connection with God?

Mike and Marcia Geiger shared a beautiful poem with me earlier this week that I thought I would share with you all. It was written by Lynn Ungar and is entitled “Pandemic”:

Pandemic

What if you thought of it
as the Jews consider the Sabbath—
the most sacred of times?
Cease from travel.
Cease from buying and selling.
Give up, just for now,
on trying to make the world
different than it is.

Sing. Pray. Touch only those
to whom you commit your life.
Center down.

And when your body has become still,
reach out with your heart.
Know that we are connected
in ways that are terrifying and beautiful.
(You could hardly deny it now.)
Know that our lives
are in one another's hands.
(Surely, that has come clear.)
Do not reach out your hands.
Reach out your heart.
Reach out your words.
Reach out all the tendrils
of compassion that move, invisibly,
where we cannot touch.

Promise this world your love—
for better or for worse,
in sickness and in health,
so long as we all shall live.

—Lynn Ungar 3/11/20

As I've been trying to make sense of everything that has happened within the last few weeks,
over and over again I have been reminded of Psalm 46, which says the following:

God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;
though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble with its tumult. **Selah**

God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved;

God will help it when the morning dawns.
The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter;
He utters his voice, the earth melts.
The Lord of hosts is with us;
The God of Jacob is our refuge. ***Selah***

“Be still, and know that I am God!

This passage is a powerful message for us in this present moment for so many reasons. Each section of the Psalm is separated by the Hebrew word “*selah*”. This word has no real meaning for us in English, and Hebrew scholars believe this word was used solely to let the reader know when to pause before moving on to the next section. The word “*selah*” wasn’t meant to be read aloud, it was simply a way of letting the reader know take a moment to be silent before moving on to the next section of the Psalm.

Perhaps this whole pandemic is an opportunity for us to take a moment to be silent, to be still and to rest. Maybe this moment in time is an opportunity for us to take an extended Sabbath.

I encourage you to take this opportunity to do just that: cease from travel, cease from work, from buying or selling, and simply be present. Cease from judging the world or trying to change it. Allow yourself opportunity to simply observe the way things are at this moment. Above all else, during this extended sabbath, seek the living God who is always within your midst!

Please know that if there is anything you need in these times, Westover Baptist Church is here for you. Please call our office number at 233-9261 if there is anything we can help you with.

For those of you that would like to still give your offering to the church, you can do so by mailing your envelope to PO Box 13048, Richmond, Va, 23225. You can also give online at the following link: <https://onrealm.org/WestoverBaptist/give/offering>.

In closing I invite you to join me in reciting the Lord’s prayer:

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,
For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever, Amen.**

With gratitude, peace and love,

Drew Nagy

Pastor - Westover Baptist Church

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