

Sunday March 11, 2007 - Killing Me Softly
Taking Time to Fill the Tank
Guest Speaker: Laird Crump
SLOWING DOWN – REST STOP AHEAD!

Here at TOB we are engaging in a new teaching series called “Killing me softly”. Ken began that series last week speaking on the issue of health and caring for the bodies God has given us. As a guy who struggles with weight issues I was pleased with Ken’s sensitivity with the subject.

I was so inspired that I found one of those computer programs that let you know what you would look like in 10 years. Here is what I look like now.



Now if I put into practice all Ken talked about last week, here’s what the computer predicted I would look like in 10 years.



Now, if I just continue in the way I am living, without looking after my health, here’s what the computer predicted I would look like.



So, the choice is pretty clear for me.

Well today I want to talk with you about another life issue we all struggle with, and that is the issue of busyness and the need for you and I to slow down.

Do any of you know what a **Stress fracture** is?

An article in Sports Illustrated gave this example of a stress fracture.

“Several years ago over 12,000 people in Portland’s Memorial Coliseum saw basketball player Sam Bowie catch the ball at the low post on the right side of the key, pivot and go up for a jump shot. As Bowie left the floor, those sitting on the court heard a sickening crack. By the time he landed, his right shinbone was all but sticking through his skin”.

Bowie had a stress fracture that suddenly became a compound fracture. He had ignored the pain in his leg for weeks. His neglect to his pain ended his season.

I’m not a Doctor but I understand that a stress fracture begins when the shocks and strains of playing game after game create microscopic cracks in the outer layers of the bone, usually in the legs or feet. If the pounding continues and those tiny cracks are not allowed to heal then

they become enlarged and begin to create pain. If that pain is ignored then eventually there will be an outright break in the bone.

How close are you to experiencing a stress fracture? Not literally in terms of a bone in your body, but rather emotionally, mentally, spiritually, how close are you to snapping? Do you ever feel that you are running on empty? I know I often do.

Breaks in bones are painful but they can't match the ache of a fractured spirit or a broken heart, or a life that crashes and burns because they have been on overdrive for too long.

The Reality of Stress

Without question, ours is a driven culture. Rest and relaxation is something we as a culture do not excel in. Busy is the name of the game. I recently discovered that the Chinese pictograph for "busy" is comprised of two characters: the character for heart and the character for killing.

When we embrace a "too busy" life it often ends up with a lot of heart damage, both literally in terms of our physical heart but also emotionally, in terms of our spirit.

Most of us realize the damaging effects of too much busyness in our lives. Interestingly we try to cram so much *into* our lives yet our fast paced life actually takes years *off* our lives. Stress causes heart attacks and ulcers not to mention a general sense of discontent in life.

Now before we get going let me do a simple stress test with you.

Stress often affects our vision. I am going to show you a picture of two dolphins frolicking in the ocean. If you see anything different you are probably too stressed out.



In all seriousness though, here are just some of the signs of stress and busyness in your life:

Intellectual Effects of Stress and Busyness

- *can't remember things*
- *making a decision is difficult*
- *repeating yourself, can't get things off your mind*
- *frequent misunderstanding of instructions*
- *a strong desire to get away from it all*
- *mind keeps racing, hard to slow down*

- *increased subjectivity*

Emotional Effects of Stress and Busyness

- *mood swings*
- *feelings of apprehension and worry*
- *irritability*
- *oversensitivity*
- *overreaction when things catch you off guard*
- *depression*
- *a lack of caring*
- *weepy*

Behavioural Effects of Stress and Busyness

- *appetite changes*
- *sleep problems (too much or too little)*
- *skipping appointments or working overtime*
- *increase use of tobacco, alcohol, drugs, caffeine*
- *increase or decrease in sexual desires*
- *extreme mood swings*
- *quick temper loss*
- *argumentative*
- *risk taking behaviour*

Physical effects of stress and busyness

- *headaches*
- *digestive problems*

- ***high blood pressure***
- ***weight gain or loss***
- ***hair loss***
- ***breathing problems***
- ***perspire easily***

Now if you're sitting beside an angry bald fat guy who is breathing heavy and perspiring profusely, has bad gas and is crying... then maybe you ought to take him to the lobby for a cup of Chamomile tea and a massage.

Now, of course, you don't have any of those symptoms do you?

Let me paint a picture of your family.

- You are happily married and you and your spouse enjoy long walks together in the woods, every day, where you have ample time to talk about the things that really matter. You do this every day after working at your rewarding and fulfilling job for 7 hours every day. When you get home from your romantic stroll you find that your children have prepared dinner for you and the kitchen is already clean as a whistle.
- The kids pass the food around the table in a clockwise direction, each making sure there is enough for second helpings for their beloved siblings.
- After that each child talks about their day recounting every detail and they experienced. Even your boys talk about their emotions and all the things they felt in their hearts that day.
- After the kids do their homework without being prompted, as a family you all go for a bike ride down to the ice cream store. You do this every day because the weather is always warm and sunny. And before the lady serving ice cream asks, they already have their favourite flavour decided upon, and bless their hearts, they never ask for a double scoop. They are more than happy with a kiddie cone.
- When you get home the kids get themselves ready for bed and once they have tucked themselves in they quietly call you to let you know they are ready to receive a good night kiss from you and to express their love and appreciation for being the best parents in the world.
- You and your spouse crawl into your beds with crisp clean sheets, have incredible romance and fall asleep, uninterrupted for your usual 9.5 hours of slumber.

Does that sound like your family experience? If so, please check your medication levels or else check your pulse because you have probably died and gone to heaven!

Although our lives have many wonderful and enjoyable things about them, for most of us, life is pretty crazy.

As a result we feel like Bilbo Baggins who said he felt like butter spread thinly over too much bread.

Fortunately God has some solutions to our problem with busyness and over-extension.

Spiritual Solutions for Handling Stress and Busyness

Very simply today, I want to walk through two passages from the Bible that may help in our pursuit of peace.

The Sabbath principle (Command)

The first passage I want to share with you is from the Ten Commandments of Deuteronomy 5:12-15

"Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 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 manservant or maidservant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor the alien within your gates, so that your manservant and maidservant may rest, as you do. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.

Before God gave these 10 Commandments, the nation of Israel were living as slaves in Egypt for over 400 years. Everyday they got up and went to work. They never had free time. They never had a day off. One day blurred into another... into another. They were not living just merely existing.

This was not God's design for humans beings made in his image. God commanded the people to stop all they were doing and rest one day in seven. He even modeled this for humanity in creation. He made the earth in six days and rested on the seventh. Resting on the seventh day was actually the climax of God's creation week. And God desires this special reward for us as well. It is a sign of being free. It allows us to see that we are loved and cherished by God by virtue of who we are not by virtue of what we do.

When we take time to rest one day in seven we affirm that God is the center of our lives. Not our work, not ourselves, but God. Resting one day in seven keeps us emotionally healthy. God's command to rest one day in seven is not a legislative punishment but rather a reward from Him. Just think of how rich and meaningful our lives would be if we all did this.

Here is something I just recently clued into. Have you ever noticed that of all the Ten Commandments there is more written on observing the Sabbath than any other command? Why is that?

Very clearly, according to God, if we do not accept His rhythm for our lives it is simply "wrong". I guess the issue is whether we have conviction about this. Actually it is not just an *idea* God gave us... it is a command. It is so important it is linked with nine other commandments, the likes of do not murder or do not commit adultery.

God feels as strongly about a day of rest as he does the sanctity of life or marital fidelity.

One struggle is that in our culture, work-a-holism is an "applaudable addiction". If someone is over-extended and stressed out, for some reason we think they must be important and successful. How wrong that assessment is.

I know I wrestle with this issue. In fact I had a period in my life when I was a full scale work-a-holic. Ironically enough I was a pastor at the time but I was obsessed with my ministry and I burned the candle at both ends and found I got badly burned in the middle. It required me to work with a counselor in order to get back on track. Part of that healing was honouring this principle of resting one day in seven. But even to this day I still struggle with this issue.

God rested on the seventh day of creation to model to us that even in something as important as creating the universe it is important to take one day in seven to rest. I had to ask myself the question: Is what I am doing more important than creation that I can't take a day off?

When we rest one day in seven it is like a spiritual recalibration.

Now of course it is easy to become legalistic with this Sabbath principle. The first century Pharisees had this problem, as did the Canadian evangelical church in the 60's and 70's generation. A legalistic approach to keeping the Sabbath with all sorts of rules and regulations was not God's idea. In fact Jesus even challenged the Pharisees with their legalistic emphasis by saying "The Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath". Now you may not be able to have your day of rest on Sundays. That is OK. The principle is that you take time to rest on a weekly basis. Many find it helpful to have mini-Sabbaths throughout the day. Some also find it helpful to take quarterly retreats, to get away for a few days of rest. Resting one day in seven cannot be legislated for you. It is a principle each person has to embrace on their own. Maybe you need to work up to a whole day of rest. Maybe you can carve out a weekly four hour period to rest and re-connect with God. Then slowly you can increase the time to actually take a whole day of rest.

But you know, I don't think Christians in this culture struggle with a legalistic approach to the Sabbath principle like we used to. The pendulum has swung far to the left and most of us need to bring it back to center. Maybe it would be healthier for us to have a quiet Sunday. To go to church and then to go home to rest. Not to use Sundays as a day to get chores done. Not to use Sundays as a time to do a quick shop or cut the lawn or to catch up on homework. But rather to have one day in seven where we actually stop and rest and do nothing but get back in touch with our identity as people made in the image of God. To go for a long walk – to have an afternoon sleep – to read the Bible and pray – to walk and talk with our kids without any deadlines – to leisurely make dinner and enjoy conversation around the table without having to rush off to a meeting or appointment – to read that good Christian book that has been sitting on the coffee table for months now gathering dust. Doesn't that resonate with you? Isn't that scenario compelling? You are probably thinking: It sounds compelling but also it sounds impossible!

You are probably thinking that you have so much to do you have to use Sundays to catch up.

The story is told of a wagon train of Christians traveling from St. Louis to Oregon, during the time the west was being settled. They religiously observed the habit of stopping for a Sabbath days rest. But as winter approached they began to panic a little fearing that they would not make it to their destination before the winter storms hit hard. A number of them proposed that they skip a day of rest and use that extra day to travel. Others vehemently disagreed. They argued about this so much that they eventually divided into two groups. One group would observe a weekly day of rest and the other would press on, traveling 7 days a week.

Which group arrived in Oregon first? You guessed it, the ones who rested one day in seven. Both the people and their horses were so rested by their observance of resting one day in seven, that they could travel far more efficiently the other six days.

Stephen Covey calls this principle "sharpening the saw". If you take time to sharpen the saw you will accomplish more than if you don't. Like tithing it seems counter-intuitive. But those who practice this discipline find it to be 100% true. God knows this about us. That is why resting one day in seven is a command.

Parker Palmer in his book "A Hidden Wholeness" writes about how there was a time when farmers on the Great Plains, at the first sign of a blizzard, would run a rope from the back door

of their house, out to barn. They all knew stories of people who had wandered off and been frozen to death, having lost sight of home in a whiteout while still in their own back yards. These farmers wandered in circles, disoriented in their ability to see. Some froze to death within a few feet of their backdoor never realizing how close they were to safety.

Many of us have lost our way in the white out of our fast paced culture. Blizzards begin when we say “yes” to too many things. We become addicted to “hurry” and try to cram as much as possible into our palms and black berries and to do lists. But when a storm comes... and they always do.... We can easily lose our way and trade our soul for the emptiness of busyness. We need a rope to lead us home.

We need a rope to lead us to a place where we can understand what this life is all about and what really matters. God calls this the Sabbath.

To slow down and sincerely rest one day in seven.

As people made in the image of God we have the ability, like God, to choose to stop and rest. But, as with the other commandments, the choice to follow God’s ideals or reject them, is up to us.

The Invitation of Jesus

As we wrap up I want to share with you an invitation Jesus gives to all of us who are stressed out.

Matthew 11:28-30

²⁸“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. ²⁹Walk with me and work with me--watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. ³⁰Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.”

In these two verses Jesus gives us three challenges that will greatly enhance our rest.

“Come to me”

This is the starting point of real rest.

Sometimes our little girls get all stressed out about life and I can see their frustration levels increasing.

At that point I know what I need to do to help them keep perspective.

I lovingly look at them, hold out my arms and say, “come here”. And as I embrace them I can feel them begin to relax knowing that their Dad should be able to help them sort out their problems.

Yet sometimes they resist because they want to fight it out on their own and their minds are running too fast to even realize that I am their dad and I am there to help.

That is not unlike our reaction to the Lord. We know that if we go to him there will be peace in his arms yet we are sometimes so frazzled that we don’t stop long enough to realize this.

You want to know something? Your name is not Clark Kent!

If we want to slow down and experience real rest we need to stop trying to be superman and respond to Jesus’ invitation to come to him. Like a loving father he says to us, “are you weary are you tired, do you feel like you have a big burden on your back? Come to me and I will give you rest”.

“Take my yoke upon you”

This is an interesting term most of us city folk are unfamiliar with. A yoke is an agricultural device that linked two working animals together, like Oxen pulling a plow or like two Clydesdale horses pulling a wagon. (city boys say “yo”, country boys say “yoke”)

Doesn't this instruction of Jesus sound strange? If we are tired and worn out why would we want to take up his yoke? That just seems like more work. You'd think Jesus would prescribe more leisure time or a vacation. Well, while many of us would wish to lie in a hammock, Jesus tells us to put on a Yoke with him. That is because being yoked with Jesus is the key to rest. This really speaks of commitment or alignment with Jesus. It is one thing to believe in Jesus, it is quite another to be committed to him.

When we are not committed to Jesus we run every which way, doing whatever feels right for the moment. Inevitably we find ourselves pursuing things that are urgent but not important. But when we allow him to be in charge and when we follow his lead, then the pieces of our lives seem to fit together with a greater sense of ease.

Jesus' third challenge is...

“Learn from me”

If we want to continue to experience the rest and purpose filled life Jesus offers us, it requires that we unlearn some of the ways we have been taught to live and re-learn how to live from God's perspective. I think that Jesus wants more for us than a quick fix rest stop amidst the busyness of life. He wants us to learn to pace ourselves with values and priorities that really matter. As we allow God to re-program our minds so to speak, then balance peace and rest are things we experience on a regular basis. Jesus knows that the answer to our harried lives is replacing a distorted value system with his value system.

As I researched this term “yoke” I discovered that farmers who use yokes with their work animals often will pair up a younger smaller animal with a strong and seasoned animal. If they don't do this the younger animal will almost pull itself to death. But when paired up with the older ox, the young one learns to pace itself properly. They learn from the older ox. I think it is a fair assumption that when Jesus gave this challenge to his followers that day, this was the image in his mind. If we don't align ourselves with him we will pull ourselves to death. When we are aligned with him, we allow him to lead and guide us and teach us.

Where are you at in all of this? Some here are literally on the verge of burnout. Some of you are strangers to you spouse and family. Believe me I know how easy it is to work just a little bit more. But it can't go on without it causing some major stress fractures in our souls.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." - Jesus

You know, all of us talk about how we really need to get our schedules under control. All of us continually complain about our busy schedules. Well for me, and I imagine for you too, it is time to proactively do something about it. You never know when those stress fractures will suddenly snap. Let's not wait until then before we do something about it.

Blessing/Benediction: Ruthlessly Eliminate Hurry. It is only as we ruthlessly eliminate hurry that we will be able to “Be still and know that He is God”