

Recreation, God's Way

People don't like to stop.

On my way to work just today, approaching a train crossing, the lights began to flash and the striped barricade began to lower on both sides of the road. The car coming toward us on the other side sped up and swerved into our lane in order to miss the lowering bar but also nearly hit the approaching pick-up truck in front of me. As a consequence, the driver of the truck (who also was trying to beat the barricade) had to slam on his brakes and came to a stop just under the lowering barricade on our side of the road which noisily bounced a couple times first on his front hood and then on his roof. I just watched in amazement and shook my head. People don't like to stop.

Nevertheless, stopping is fundamental to recreation. Oh, not what we commonly call recreation but re-creation, being made new. And this is absolutely essential to all of us. Now, physically, your body stops you every day – you have no choice. Ultimately, you will sleep. And of course, sleeping brings refreshment and a renewal of sorts.

Now, many of you Bible students, when you think of being renewed will flash to Isaiah 40:31 which says, *"But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew [their] strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; [and] they shall walk, and not faint."* But this is not speaking principally of the renewal of your temporal body and strength.

You see, that word "wait" is better translated 'look eagerly for, hope,

expect', and "renew" is really much better translated as 'to pass on or away, pass through, pass by, go through'. If you reread the verse with this in mind you can better see that this is speaking of anticipating the Lord's return and at some point, either being called home or by the rapture, passing through the strength of the flesh. There, with the Lord and with your new heavenly body, you will indeed fly as an eagle, run and not be weary, walk and not faint. It's a glorious promise.

But physical re-creation is not what we're going to talk about because short of heaven, it's benefits are very temporary. No, what I'm going to share with you, if you receive it, will lead you to both genuine and much longer lasting refreshment.

Paul spoke of it in terms of the mind, that is, how we think and especially how we learn. He wrote in Romans 12:2 *"And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the **renewing** of your mind..."* and in Eph 4:23 *"And be **renewed** in the spirit of your mind;"* Then, as if to amplify he wrote in 2 Cor 4:16 *"...but though our outward man perish, yet the inward [man] is **renewed** day by day."* So, what exactly is this "inward man"? I'll try to explain:

You see, we were created as triune beings -- spirit, soul and flesh. Here's how they came about.... Back in Genesis, *"...the LORD God formed man [of] the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."* (Gen 2:7) God started with the dust of the

ground, the lowest thing in His creation and then breathed into the man the 'ruach', the breath, which is the same word used for His Spirit, that which is above all creation. The result of this combination was a soul, a living soul. That which could be influenced by either source.

When man sinned, he died spiritually. That means he was separated from God. The connection with God which made his soul alive was severed. Which influence was left then to influence the soul? The dust, the world. Now, when you are truly saved, your spirit is revived, made alive again by the Holy Spirit. At that point, your soul is no longer governed only by the flesh. From this point on, your soul, the spiritually influenced part of your mind begins to be rewired, "transformed". That is, your soul, your inner man is being made new. It is not, however, purely automatic.

Jesus, however, gave us the key. He told us how it works both at the point of salvation and during the process of sanctification. But before I point you to His answer, let me illustrate its three principle points with three principle men:

Moses was at the turning point of his life. There, on the backside of a place that rivaled the moon for least likely places to vacation, the man picked by God wandered with the flock of his father in law. You remember the story from Sunday school no doubt. After 40 years of learning to be a somebody in Pharaoh's household, Moses then spent another 40 years learning to be content as a nobody. It's one thing to live in the desert wilderness with a bunch of smelly sheep and

goats. It's quite another to be content there... especially after experiencing the pleasures of the court of a mighty king.

For Moses, it was a long and lowly road of preparation, but God knew he was ready by a simple test. It started with a bush, an ordinary bush with an extraordinary flame. Now, it was not uncommon to see a bush or scrub-tree burning in this desert wasteland, but this one was different – remember? It burned with fire but was not consumed. Now, in order to notice such a thing, Moses had to gaze upon it for some time. In fact, he probably did a double or triple-take. He may have wondered if it was a mirage.

But the scripture says that it wasn't until Moses said, *"I will go over and see this strange sight-why the bush does not burn up,"* and turned aside, that God called to him.

This really is fascinating – Moses, like most of us in this day could have missed it and probably would have years earlier. When life is full of business that makes us feel important, such things are either unnoticed or unappreciated. But Moses, after forty years of doing what his Egyptian upbringing taught him was abhorrent (that is, shepherding) noticed the supernatural within the natural. He was a big man in a big hurry to do big things back in Egypt. But here, there was no one to impress, no schedule to keep, no day-timers or PDA's. In appreciating this wondrous sight, **Moses had to draw near and stop.**

Elijah was a busy man – false prophets to kill, evil kings to chase. It was hard to get an appointment

with him and not get fire called down on you. But Elijah burned out. – no more fire from heaven, no more fire in his soul. Consequently, God led him on a hike to a wilderness cave in Mt Horeb – you know, the place where Moses got the 10 commandments. Same place where he stopped to see the burning bush. There, *“a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks... and after the wind an earthquake... And after the earthquake a fire.”*

Must have seemed familiar to Elijah. After all, this was his style. But the Bible records, *“the LORD [was] not in the wind... [or] the earthquake... [or] the fire.”*

But then, a still small voice called to him. It was the Lord, -- **Elijah drew near and stopped (his attitude).**

Stop was not in Saul's vocabulary. Ignoring the 'goads' of God's Spirit, he unceasingly chased after new Christians, imprisoning them or abetting in their murder. Talk about a type A personality! Now, Moses had a 40 year winding down, Elijah had a 40 day hike; neither of these things was in the cards for Saul. He just kept pushing the conviction of God's Spirit away. So God stopped him in his tracks. Knocking him flat, God got his undivided attention. *“And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?”* In mercy, **Saul was drawn near and stopped in his tracks.**

And so, the first part of Christ's answer to renewing the inner man is to **draw near to the Lord and stop.** The next part has to do with how you 'walk' with Him.

Moses was in a hurry; way ahead of the Lord. At forty years of age, he saw an Egyptian beating one of his fellow Hebrews and he killed him. As a result, he had to flee for his life into the Sinai wilderness. Some forty years later, he'd slowed down; in fact, he'd slowed down too much – when God called him to go back to Egypt, he made lame excuses. However, over the next forty years he learned to walk most of the time in pace with the Lord...remember? The pillar of fire and the cloud that moved? When they moved Moses moved. That was the deal.

Elijah was always out in front and seemingly bold as a lion. Even in obeying the Lord – defending the faith – but he got too far in front. The scene was mount Carmel. Responding to Elijah's challenge, king Ahab had gathered the prophets of Baal, some 450 of them. Of course the outcome was a clear victory for the Lord as he responded graciously to Elijah's call for fire from heaven and all the prophets of Baal were slain. One problem however; Elijah had misrepresented himself. *“Elijah said to the people, “I alone am left a prophet of the LORD; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men.”* 1 Kings 18:22

After this though, he fell behind, way behind the Lord's pace, for shortly afterward, when he found out that the queen wanted to kill him he *“went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, “It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!”*

Later, in that wilderness cave he hiked for 40 days to find, the Lord corrected him about being the only one on the planet to serve God. He said He'd reserved 7,000 in Israel who were faithful. He also gave him a new direction and a faithful helper, Elisha. In the years that followed, Elijah dealt with both Ahab and Jezebel and never misrepresented himself; in fact, he never referred to himself. And he never backed down or became fearful.

In fact, I submit that as an illustration of how synchronous his walk became with the Lord, we find him finishing his ministry by being shadowed by Elisha. Three times this happened – *“Then Elijah said to him, “Elisha, stay here, please, for the LORD has sent me on to Bethel.” But he said, “As the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you!” So they came to Bethel... then Jericho... and then Jordan.”* Elisha's walk with Elijah was a mirror of Elijah's walk with our Lord.

Newly saved, Paul was so ahead of the Lord! He wanted with all his heart to reach the Jews for Jesus. He preached to them in Damascus and they tried to kill him; then he preached to them in Jerusalem and they tried to kill him there too. As a matter of fact, he was causing such a commotion that he had to be sent away just so the churches could have peace. *“Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.”* Act 9:31

But as with Moses and Elijah, he then fell behind; he just 'camped out' so to speak in Tarsus for years. Whether he felt rejected or not we don't know, but he clearly had no significant impact recorded for us in the scripture. Finally, Barnabus came to Tarsus and brought him back into ministry within the greater body of Christ. After this, throughout the rest of the book of Acts, we find him always seeking specific direction step by step from the Holy Spirit.

Each of these men got ahead of the Lord, then got behind, yet they each came to eventually keep pace with Him – to walk in lock-step with Him.

So the first part of the Lord's answer to recreation, to renewal, is drawing near to the Lord and stopping, ceasing from your own attitude or activity. Next, is in the course of serving Him, coming to keep pace with Him – closer and closer, literally step by step. The third part has to do with learning.

I used to teach at Ball State University in Indiana. Now, in that role, I was supremely concerned that my students learned the material I presented to them. But that kind of learning isn't what God uses in His recreation process. What He intends for us to 'learn' is illustrated partially in the following verse: *“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.”* (Acts 4:13) You see, in spending time

with Jesus, Peter and John learned something, oh not just facts, not simply information – they picked up on Jesus' character. In this case, they learned to be bold as the occasion warranted it.

However, the best example is found in the book of Revelation. There, the apostle John, a good Jewish boy and mature Christian – one who definitely knew who to worship and who not to, got a bit confused. On two occasions, when he fell in worship before the messenger showing him around so to speak, the saint said, “See *that you do not do that!* I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God!” Now, why did John do that? I submit that it was because he thought this fellow servant was indeed Jesus! There is coming for us in heaven, in the presence of Almighty God, a glorious transformation. John wrote, “*Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.*” (1 John 3:2)

You see, the learning we're concerned with is not an issue of facts, data, or information. It's not a method, process or technique. There's no accreditation or diploma. The learning we care about is experiential. In fact, the word for learn in the new testament is born from the word meaning to know, specifically to know through an intimate relationship.

Moses and the Lord had such a relationship. In Exodus 33, we read,

“Then Moses said to the LORD, ‘See, You say to me, ‘Bring up this people.’ But You have not let me know whom You will send with me. Yet You have said, ‘I know you by name, and you have also found grace in My sight.’ Now therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in Your sight, show me now Your way, that I may know You and that I may find grace in Your sight. And consider that this nation is Your people.” And He said, “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”” (Ex 33:12-14) As a consequence, Moses saw the glory of the Lord as He passed by and later descended the mount with his face glowing. (Ex 34)

Elijah and the Lord had such a relationship. Only two men in the history of the earth have been taken to heaven before death. Enoch, of whom it was written that “he walked with God” and Elijah who was caught up in a whirlwind by a chariot of fire. Wow! No one else was ever chauffeured like that. You gotta believe Elijah **knew** the Lord.

Paul had such a relationship. He wrote: “*For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.*” 1 Cor 13:12
“*And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.*” Eph 3:19
“*That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;*” Phi 3:10

And so the three part answer to God's recreation of the inner man has nothing to do with golf or fly fishing or idle time. In fact, too much idle time can be a trap. You know yourselves that idle time is not necessarily related to renewal. In fact, Ezekiel recorded that it was too much idleness that led to the destruction of Sodom. He wrote to Jerusalem, “*Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, ...*” (Ez 16:49)

The three parts are these:

- To draw near to the Lord and to stop, to cease your own activity and ‘attitudes’
- To come to minister with Him in step, in lock step unity
- As a result, to come to know Him and consequently to be like Him inwardly.

As we began this lesson, I told you that Jesus laid the whole issue to rest (ha). He told us how it works both at the point of salvation and during the process of sanctification. Here's what He said: “***Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.***” Mat 11:28 – 30

- *Come to Me ... and I will give you rest.* That word “rest” literally means stop. Do you see the pattern? Draw close to Him and He will give you “stop”.

Usually, we can't stop ourselves. Our activity or attitude is overbearing. We simply need to draw near to Him and He will stop us.

- *Take My yoke upon you.* It's not a leash or tether. A yoke requires you to walk in harmony with Him – not ahead or behind but rather in unity, step by step.
- *And learn from Me – gentleness and humility.* You won't just learn to plow or pull the right way. Rather, you'll take on the character of the one you're yoked to.
- As a consequence, *you will find rest for your souls.* This word “rest” is different from the first one. It is anapausis in the Greek and means not only rest and refreshment but literally, **recreation.**

Oh, to be like my Lord! (See 2 Cor 3:18) This is the essence of heavenly mindedness isn't it. This is the goal. This is real, eternal refreshment and renewal. This is recreation God's way!