

The Heart of Rest

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Last week we looked at a renewal cycle. What is renewal? To renew means to reinvigorate something that's broken or worn down. When I take apart my razor, clean and oil the blades, and put it back together, I renew it. I give it new life, not in the sense of replacing it but restoring it. Giving it a rest and reenergize it. We talk a lot about renewing cities, but I believe God also wants to renew *us*, to restore our tired faith, invigorate our indifferent hearts, producing ripple effects in the city. How do we experience renewal, enjoy spiritual rest? Psalm 131 gives us a picture of spiritual rest. It begins with the heart. Let's look at the Ambitious Heart, Awestruck Heart, Childlike Heart.

Ambitious Heart

We're an incredibly ambitious culture. We plan and dream to reverse climate change, rectify racial injustice, renew the city, grow the company, hit record numbers, raise well-educated kids, drop 20 pounds, and execute a side hustle. Ambition. We believe we shouldn't just sit around all day. We should be productive. Get stuff done. Adopt those atomic habits, achieve those vocational goals. After all, God made us *to work*. The author of this psalm, king David, is known to this day for his accomplishments—the shepherd boy

who ran to the battlefield with the great Goliath, and slew him when everyone else cowered. The king of whom the people sang, “King Saul killed his thousands but David his ten thousands.” And let’s not forget, the man who aspired to build a house *for God*, a temple fit for *the King of kings*. Ambitious might be an understatement. David got stuff done. And it is this David who says, *I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me*. What could he possibly mean? The word occupy means to walk or follow. Although David accomplished some great things, he didn’t strive for greatness. He didn’t follow the strategies of ancient Near Eastern kings. He didn’t occupy himself with success. He actually kept his ambition in check by having a greater ambition, a higher occupation—*One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple* (27:4). He had a governor on his ambition. When I was flying down east Texas roads in high school in Clayton King’s red Camaro, he couldn’t get it over 100mph. Why? There was a governor on his car that limited its speed. David had a governor on his ambition, a limiter that restrained his heart. Many of us don’t have a governor when it comes to work, parenting, side hustle, social media. Restraint isn’t in our vocab. We love books like *Get Things Done*, *The Power of Habit*, *The War of Art*, *The Four Hour Work Week*. And we smuggle Christianity into our Ambition. Our

goals swallow our God. That might be a bit much. Do you ever think, God if things wouldn't keep going wrong at work, I could do a lot more for your kingdom. Have you found yourself really leaning into that side hustle instead of slowing down to worship on Sundays? Is there just too much to do to pray? We often treat God as an enhancement to our ambitious life, *not as the one thing we seek.*

When we do show up, we barge into his presence looking for a quick fix: comfort if we're sad, wisdom if we have a big decision to make, a brush with the transcendent to check the spiritual box. But we don't dwell in his house, gaze at his beauty, rest in his presence. Ambitious people want the Bible *to work*. To be efficient. To get things done. And it does, but not the way we think. Not on our terms. Christianity is not about getting things done but getting us done, not about our goals but about Christ's goals. Without that governor we speed through life until we run smack into a tree, an obstacle, a heartache. Heschel: Rushing through the ecstasies of ambition, we only awake when plunged into dread or grief...then we turn to prayer. The person who doesn't get serious about God until their marriage falls apart, who didn't really pray until their health was threatened, doesn't make God their one thing until their ambition is taken away. Don't wait until you crash. Pull over, stop killing it, and walk into his temple, behold his beauty, enter his rest.

Awestruck Heart

How do we do that? *To experience God's renewing rest replace an ambitious heart with an awestruck heart.* How do we get an awestruck heart? For that to happen, we have to realize the problem runs deeper than swapping out productivity habits for spiritual habits. David says *I do not occupy myself with things too marvelous for me.* The word marvelous is used to describe the great works of Providence: creation, the exodus rescue, defeat of armies. Things you and I could never do. Things we aren't meant to scrutinize as much as mesmerize, stand in awe of. I don't occupy myself with the complexities of providence. Arent we supposed to use our brains? Yes but the productive rationalist has a hard time getting past the brain, opening up the heart, to awe. We prefer to obtain expert knowledge of great and marvelous things. We believe if we listen to enough podcasts and read enough articles we can nail getting the baby to bed, be an all-star in our career, get a handle on covid. But God's agenda is to get a handle on us, to slow us down, to draw us in, to put us in awe of his glory—the one thing that we cannot comprehend by analysis but only by awe. Heschel. And that takes time. That requires stillness. Mystery and awe not productivity and analysis draw us into rest. Job eventually realized this, *Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know* (42:2-3). He learned to be mesmerized by

the *too wonderful*. Paul: *Who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counselor, or who has given him a gift that he might be repaid? For from him, and through him, and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever and ever Amen.* Rom 11:34-36

Put down the pen, close the apps, walk away from the information stream, *and be still*. Acknowledge your ignorance and contemplate God's omnipotence. In a scene from C. S. Lewis's *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, Eustace attempts to show off his knowledge, sharing what scientists understand about the nature of a star. "In our world," he says, "a star is a huge ball of flaming gas." To which the wise old man says, "*Even in your world, my son, that is not what a star is but only what it is made of.*" What is it? Red-orange fire, glorious heat and light. Beauty that sets our skies ablaze. It is what inspired Van Gogh's starry night who said, "When I have a terrible need of—shall I say, religion—then I go out and paint the stars. Are you too busy for awe? In all your productivity, mastery, knowledge, do you walk up to the edge of mystery and awe and turns right around? Your back to the sun.

Childlike Heart

How then do we face the Sun? Behold the Beauty? Invite awe? *I have calmed and quieted my soul*. We have to get still enough to recognize and confess our ambition, inattentiveness, and self-glory

in God's presence. To ask him to replace an ambitious heart with an awestruck heart. And to do that, we need a new disposition. One that cuts out the noise, turns off the notifications, retreats into the silence. A calm and quieted heart. There are things to do: undo our doing. Begin being, not ambitious rationalists but weened children: [like weaned child is my soul within me](#). Why is a weened child the picture of rest? He no longer screams and cries and fits for sustenance. A weened child quietly trusts. The Hebrew actually says like weaned child *on* its mother. It's the image of a child, arm wrapped around his mother's leg, confident of her protection and provision. Quiet, reposed. Mom is in charge; she is in control, and she knows what's best. A heart that knows there's no need to scream and cry. A picture of rest. A weened soul is a dependent soul, a trusting spirit, a content child satisfied with his parent's provision. And so it is with us. *To experience God's renewing rest, we must exchange an ambitious heart for an awestruck heart, a busy heart for a trusting heart, a hyper-analytical heart for a heart that slows down and stands in awe of God.* Now what do you do if you struggle with this? [O Israel hope in the Lord](#). Hope in the Lord. Don't rush to technique. Hope in Christ, who became a weened child. Who himself waited on the Lord. Who stumbled as a toddler, who learned to walk, speak, work, laugh, study, and suffer before accomplishing anything. 33 years. Why? To know your struggle. To sympathize

with your weakness. The Hebrew word hope means to linger, to wait for. Jesus lingered in God's presence, in the garden of Gethsemane, so we can enter into his presence. He's calling you. Take a deep breath. Set aside speed, efficiency, productivity, and deadlines and linger in *his* presence. And as you do, as you hope not in accomplishment but in Christ—calmly and quietly—you will enjoy the renewing presence of Christ in a chaotic world. Come *to me* all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest. A soul at rest is a neon light in a dark and discouraged world.