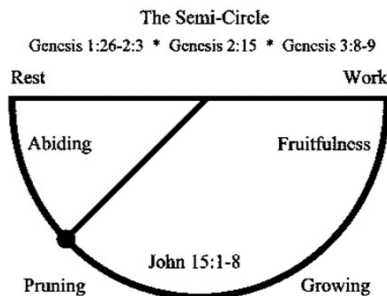


LoveFirst Coast

for Life on Mission

The Semi Circle: The Rhythm of Life



Drawn from *Building a Discipling Culture* by Mike Breen, *Making Room for Life* by Randy Frazee, and *The Rest of God*, by Mark Buchannan. Key Scriptures: Genesis 1-3, Exodus 20:8-11, Deuteronomy 5:12-15, John 15:1-17

Summary: God desires that our lives be productive and fruitful, but in order to do so, we must learn to live in the rhythm of life God intended for us. God's pattern from creation was to start from a place of resting and abiding in God, to move toward fruitful productivity and then return to

rest and abide.

Beginning with Genesis 1, we see a pattern in the language of each day of creation: "there was evening, there was morning, the first day..." There was a daily rhythm. Notice that the day begins at evening. Many people are aware that in Jewish tradition, the day begins at sunset. Think through what happened at sunset before the days of artificial light. Most of the work, even the preparation for the evening meal, needed to be completed before sundown. The family would gather, probably near the fire or at a lamp, and enjoy the meal. They had to talk, to tell stories, and just be together. In Ephesians 4, the Apostle Paul emphasizes "not letting the sun go down on your anger." It was meant to be a peaceful time, telling stories, and being with family. It was meant to be a time of physical and emotional nourishment through enjoy food and a time of fellowship together. After being together, it was time to sleep. I wonder how much better we would sleep if we had a similar pattern today?

After the night's rest, work would begin. The pattern of creation was to work from a place of rest. That is the pattern of scripture. From this we can find a key principle: We are to be rested before we work. This is very much contrary to the cultural pattern of my life: I have been taught in many ways that rest is what comes after completing work, and to "burn the midnight oil" if need be to complete my work. This is contrary to the order of creation. First, nourishment, fellowship, and rest – then work and productivity. That is an intended daily rhythm.

That is why in this shape the pendulum begins with Rest! We rest before our work. God intended us to enjoy this pattern of rest and work for six days and then to enjoy a complete day of rest on the seventh. One could argue that sounds like resting from work. The scripture even says God rested (or more accurately, "ceased") from all his work (Genesis 2:2). But the rhythm of rest before work was already established. For before the first day, God was enjoying the love and uninterrupted fellowship found in the trinity before creating all things. Out of the overflow of his love, for an eternity of relationship and love, God created everything, and it was good! Rest precedes work. Rest one day and work six. That is a pattern for each week. Rest each evening and then rise to be productive. That is a pattern for each day. Rest then work.

But pay attention here! Resting is not necessarily inactivity. Resting involves the sort of practices and activities that restore us. It is important to examine yourself and to know what restores your soul and reminds you of who you are. It is equally important to recognize what doesn't. What is it that restores your life? What restores your

capacity to give and receive love? My daily pattern begins with a meal with friends or family, reading the scripture and praying together, and no work after 9:00pm. (I wish I could back that up a bit – but when I do it begins to feel like a burden. And if the rhythm feels like a burden something is wrong!) My morning rhythm – still rest – begin before sunrise. That routine involves a cup of coffee, meditating on a few verses of scripture, prayer that usually begins with praise and thanksgiving, and occasionally journaling about what God is teaching me. Every day, this puts me in God's presence and helps me remember who I am. Weekly, I try to take a sabbath. The best day right now is Saturday. (Sundays are work days for me.) What I do varies, but I try to do something that makes me feel alive and restores my capacity to love. A few of those things are listening to or making music, enjoying a good meal with friends or family, and having special times my family, going on a date with my wife, reading something that holds my attention, long walks in our neighborhood or on the beach, engaging in worship, taking naps, and even working out. When I do these things, I feel I am embracing life! What about you?

On the other hand, it is important to know what makes you feel spent, exhausted, and weary? Sitting in meetings, looking at insurance, paying bills, and fixing computer problems leave me feeling drained after a few minutes. Many things I enjoy can leave me drained, too, if I work at them for too long without a break. But pretty much all of these draining things are necessary. I need to earn a living and take care of my home and business matters. And I feel good after getting things out of the way. I enjoy being productive, but if it goes on and on without end, the joy of productivity begins to more like slavery to endless tasks. Go on too long and burn out could ensue and then productivity would cease. But productivity and work are good. God designed us to be fruitful and productive. Work is not part of the curse. Adam and Eve worked in the garden before the fall. We are designed for intentional activity. In the new heaven and new earth, we can expect to find fully redeemed work. To be productive and joyful, we need to rest.

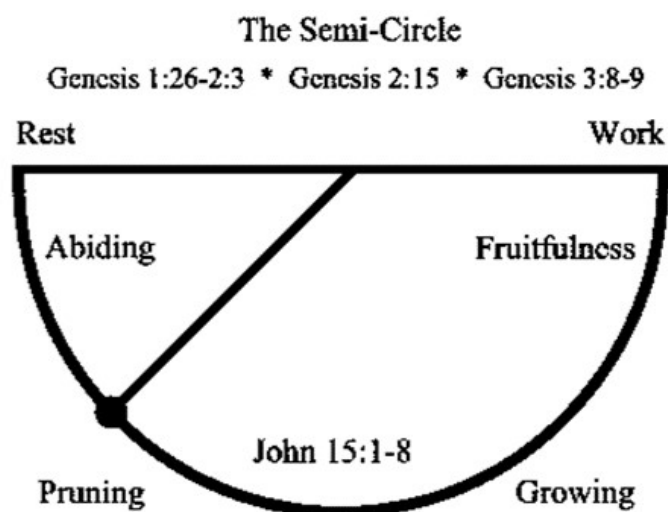
But how do we work this out? There is a very helpful phrase from Mark Buchanan that captures what Sabbath rest is about: "Embrace life. Refrain from what is necessary."

So what are the necessary things you have to do? During Sabbath abiding times, refrain from those things if you can. (This is not legalism. If you absolutely have to do something, just do it.) But what are the things that bring you life? Try to do them in the evening or on the Sabbath. Develop a rhythm of time set aside for embracing life and refraining from what is necessary – a rhythm for each day and for each week. And you will find new energy and productivity for your work. Also, plan quarterly and annual Sabbath times. That roughly follows the pattern you seem Jesus living in the gospels.

On the other side of the pendulum is productivity.

In the creation account of Genesis 1, human beings were commanded to be fruitful and multiply. We were made to work. So it is natural that unemployment is a problem. It leads people to feel usefulness is lost, as though they are no longer being fully human. As a side note, retirement is not about entering into inactivity, either. People who become inactive after retirement often struggle, become self-centered, and some even die quickly. No amount of golf or fishing can take the place of being fruitful. In God's Kingdom, if we are capable of being fruitful then fruitfulness is expected. The strength of this expectation is captured in II Thessalonians 3: "If anyone will not work, neither let him eat..." "And as for you, brothers and sister, do not grow weary in doing good!" We can expect to have productive work to do when we enjoy "a new heaven and a new earth." Work itself became cursed in the fall but it is being redeemed as God's Kingdom advances. Rest... in order to work!

As I alluded to above, here on the First Coast, many of us try to work all the time. Ours is an industrious city. 24-7 lifestyles can turn us into human “doings” rather than human “beings.” Many people I meet talk like slaves. It seems that too few of us have a rhythm for life that includes rest. There is no command regarding daily rest. It’s just the pattern of creation. However, the command to keep the Sabbath shows up in both biblical listings of the ten commandments. In the first listing in Exodus 20, the children of Israel are commanded to keep the Sabbath because that was the pattern of creation – six days of work and one day of rest in which God appreciated his creation. Therefore that day was set apart and holy. In Deuteronomy 5, the emphasis is different. The commandment says to keep the Sabbath because *they were no longer slaves in Egypt*. As slaves, they had to “do” work all the time. But as free people, they could rest and take time and simply “be.” They could rest, knowing God would take care of them. They could rest and remember they were the free children of God. Rest one day in seven to appreciate creation and to know you are God’s child, a child of the king, and not a slave!



Jesus uses the metaphor of the vine and the branches in John 15:1-17. In first century vineyard practices, when a vine was planted, the branches would be cut back and prevented from bearing grapes for the first three years. If the plant began producing fruit, those branches would be cut off. All of the energy needed to be directed to grow the vines to be strong enough to support the load of the fruit that would come in time. (Are we okay with this kind of delay? At this point, the disciples had probably been with Jesus probably three years and had been used to produce a little fruit – but they were about to be more productive than they could have imagined.) Back to the farming, each year afterward, as the vine would begin to grow, the vine keeper would prune the extra branches so that more energy would flow into producing fruit. (Again, are we willing to accept seasons of non-productivity after seasons of bearing fruit?) After the branch produced fruit, it would be cut back and pruned again. (In your life, what needs to be cut back? What is making you unproductive? Do you have a sustainable rhythm of rest and productivity?)

Jesus makes several things clear in this passage. 1) Fruitfulness – building his Kingdom with our lives – is not optional AND the timing is not up to us. Patience is required. 2) In order to be productive, we can expect to be “pruned”. Ouch! But its a good thing. It will lead to more productivity in the kingdom of God. 3) If we don’t learn to abide with Jesus, we’ll accomplish nothing. And this is as it should be. Our identity as God’s children precedes any act of obedience. God does not love us because of what we can do for him. God loves us simply because we are his! He invites us to abide with him first because that is where we are reminded who we are.

There is much good news here. It is good that Jesus desires to produce wonderful things in us and through us. But even better, Jesus wants to be with us. He created us for relationship with him. We would be crazy to miss that just to get a few more things done.

Review:

1. We are to work from our rest, not rest from our work.
2. Rest is not optional if we are to walk in the lifestyle of a disciple.
3. We cannot bear fruit if we do not spend time abiding.
4. If your attempts to rest feel like a burden, something is wrong.
5. Aren't we supposed to be pressing forth with all our energy to do the work of the kingdom? In a word, no. Our relationship with God comes first.
6. We find abundant grace in being who God made us to be.

Examples: How Jesus Rested in this Rhythm of Life

1. Resting through extended times of retreat (Mark 1:12-13)
2. Regular daily times of quiet resting with the Lord (Mark 1:35-39)
3. Teaching the disciples to rest (Mark 6:30-32)

Other examples...

1. Jesus alone at the lake before teaching – Mark 2:13
2. Jesus withdraws with his disciples – Mark 3:7
3. Jesus goes to the mountainside and calls his disciples – Mark 3:13
4. Jesus leaves the crowds and gets into the boat – Mark 4:35
5. Jesus at the lake/hillside – Mark 5:1
6. Jesus crosses the lake to the other side – Mark 5:21
7. Jesus sends the disciples ahead, dismisses the crowd and goes to the mountain to pray – Mark 6:45-46

Questions for Reflection:

1. What's easier? Working or resting?
2. How's your rhythm of life? What do you need to do about it?
3. How can legalism about Sabbath keeping be avoided?
4. Rest tends to be harder for people in our culture. What are cultures that get it right? Do you know of cultures that don't emphasize fruitfulness? Try to avoid judgment, but how might they be getting it wrong?
5. How do you see this teaching connecting with the Triangles?
6. Is there someone who does the Rhythm of Life well that you could learn from? To whom can you pass it on?

What do you think God may be saying to you? What will

Share this:

