

Gospel Community Guide

The psalmists seem to God in the midst of a variety of life situations. What kept them, and keeps us answering God in the midst of whatever circumstance of life we find ourselves in at any particular moment, is longing for the world that God created and for God himself. A world of security, justice, prosperity and sure hope in a God who is good, gracious, great and glorious. The environment described for us in the Garden of Genesis and the Garden city of Revelation.

Yet, we experience much of our existence in something more akin to the Circus. The setting of our daily stories as parents, neighbors, spouses, roommates, employees, and even the church; is an effectively efficient entertaining display of lights, sounds, and movements in which we find ourselves repetitively rotating between spectator and performer. Exhausting our resources in the performance for work, family, garnering of likes/views and pursuit of fulfillment; then crashing down in the grandstands to veg-out on the show surrounding us. Waking tomorrow only to repeat.

The Circus life is momentarily and seasonally satisfying, but it is not sustaining. Eventually we physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually burnout; and either attempt to start over in a new job, a new marriage, a new passion or take control by building up resources that keep us from feeling the emptiness created by the Circus rhythms.

So, how do we enter a different rhythm, the seasons of the Garden? We discover the answer in the faith practice of **STOPPING**.

1 DISCOVERING OUR FAITH PRACTICE OF *STOPPING*

Stopping is physically and mentally being still for reflection. It is not turning off, zoning out or escaping. **Stopping is ceasing striving for the purpose of taking note.** When we stop, we are gaining perspective. Self-perspective, God's perspective and contextual perspective. When we take time to be still, "Things will rise from the depths. As we stop, we will encounter what has been outside of our range of vision, beneath our consciousness, perhaps [hinted at] only intuitively." (Susan Phillips)

Think about a time when you actually stopped and took the time to observe. What did you discover?

2 PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Stopping can be spontaneous, but in most cases we have to plan to stop. Whether you are disconnecting daily or setting rhythms of rest, Stopping requires some planning in order for there to be both time and space to take note of your heart and the heart of God. The exercise below is meant to help each person discover a pattern of stopping this week and to begin to learn how to take note in his or her stopping.

- 1) Break into groups of three to four. Before you start the conversation, pray for ears to hear and eyes to see your own heart and God's.
- 2) Have each person commit to stopping in one of the following ways for the next week. Be sure to provide specifics of time and place for the stopping.
 - a. A 20 minute block of time, disconnected from technology and tasks.
 - b. A 20 minute block of time to physically ponder; whether over lunch or on a walk.
- 3) Now, practice stopping together. Take 20 minutes to reflect on God's presence and purposes in your life today. Where do you see God working? Where does God seem to be absent?
- 4) Afterwards, share what you observed with one another. Perhaps sharing the difficulty of reflecting for that long! Help one another recognize emotions, grace, brokenness and even direction.
- 5) End your time together praying over one another; speaking back to God the grace he showed you within and through one another.

3 CULTIVATING GRACE THROUGH *STOPPING*

Stopping allows us to enter into the rhythms and seasons of life in the Garden. So, **commit over the six weeks to setting a schedule for stopping regularly.** Start with daily disconnection and physical pondering. Then plan out some rhythms of rest and even carefree celebrations. **Don't forget to write** down what you hear, experience, think, feel, question, are convicted by etc.!