

## GENESIS 2:1-3

### A HOLY HOLIDAY

I am guessing you have never heard of this one: The U.S. Running Streak Association. This is a group of people who run at least a mile a day, every day. If you get on their website, you will discover that 44 people around the United States have run at least a mile a day, every day, for at least the last 30 years. The person with the longest streak is Mark Covert of Lancaster, California. He has run at least a mile a day, every day, since July 23, 1968 - over 41 years ago.

What do you think of people like that? Are you impressed or depressed? Should we praise them or pity them?

This year, we are walking through the five scenes of the story of God's world and our lives. The first scene is the story of creation. At the start of Genesis 2, we read of the seventh day of creation. God creates in six days, he rests on the seventh day, and he establishes the seventh day as a special day for the creatures he has made. Later, the Bible describes this as the "Sabbath" and "the Lord's Day."

What a big subject! We could say so much more than I will say today. If you profess faith in Jesus Christ today, know that Jesus believed in the seventh day and honored the seventh day, and part of our call is to follow him in this. But since we are in the first scene, let's give most of our attention to the original design of the seventh day of creation.

This is a very personal subject. This is about how you live your part of the story - day by day and week by week. We will ponder the day in your heart, and the day in your story.

Let's start with **THE DAY IN YOUR HEART**, because when we think of the seventh day, we tend to rush to what we should and should not do. But as we read these words, we are driven to face our heart attitudes toward the God who created the seventh day.

We read in Genesis 2:1 that after six days, the heavens and earth were completed in all their "vast array." God's creation is good. It is very good. Then in verse 2, we learn that when God finished his work, he rested from his work. He was not tired out - but he stopped his work of creating, because he had accomplished his purpose in creating.

Why is this important? The writer of Genesis - probably Moses - is showing us that this is the way God has made the world to be. He has created a creation that lives in a rhythm of six days of work, and one day of rest. It was the pattern for God the Creator, and it is the pattern for us as his creatures.

So as these words search your heart, I offer you two simple questions. First, *ARE YOU HUMBLE?* If God has made the world, and if God has made the world this way, how do you respond to his created order? Here is the problem: I wonder if already some of you are resisting this word in your hearts. You may be thinking, "Oh, no. Here comes another sermon about Sunday. Time for another rant about how I should not do what I like to do on Sunday. I don't want to hear it. I am going to do what I am going to do, and no one is going to change my mind."

That is pride. You are saying, "I am going to live my life my way - without regard to the patterns God has made." As humans, we are good at this. We don't like being told what to do. Even if you claim Jesus as Savior and Lord, you may resist his claim upon this part of your life.

What is in your heart right now? Are you filled with pride? Do you believe you can live your story your way? Or are you willing to be taught by the patterns revealed in God's Word?

Are you proud? Now a second question for your heart: *ARE YOU WISE?*

Do you remember this riddle, which you probably learned around sixth grade? "If you drop a pound of feathers and a pound of bricks at the same time from a tall building, which will hit the ground first?" You think, "The bricks will hit first." But you haven't listened well, because the riddle describes a pound of feathers and a pound of bricks. They weigh the same, so the law of gravity means they will fall at the same speed and hit the ground at the same time.

Why? God made the world that way. We have physical laws that direct and dictate life in this world. You may dislike them, but you cannot defeat them. If you don't believe me, stand under a pound of feathers or a pound of bricks dropped from a tall building, and see what happens to you!

It may not seem this way, but what is true for feathers and bricks, is true for this rhythm that God has established. If God has made the world this way, we should strive to follow the pattern of our Creator. In the Bible, the person who does this is called "wise." The person who does not do this is called a "fool." Do you realize that God is far wiser than you, and that you are wise to walk in the pattern that he has designed for you? Or are you not only proud, but foolish? Do you think you can resist God's created order?

How is foolishness working for you? Adults, how is your lifestyle affecting your health? Young people, how are your late nights helping your grades? Everyone - how are we doing with stress? When was the last time you made a dumb mistake at work because you were too tired to think straight? When was the last time you got into a conflict at school because you had loaded yourself up with Red Bull or Starbucks to keep yourself alert? How often do you complain, because of choices you have made, "I'm so busy! My life is chaos! I am so worn out!"

Part of me admires the people on the list of the U.S. Running Streak Association. I like to run, and I cannot imagine doing what they do. Yet I wonder about the wisdom of it. If God's created pattern is six days of work and one day of rest, am I not wise to take a day off? In every area of life - are you living in the wise ways of the wise God who made you and your world?

Where is the day in your heart? Are you too proud and foolish to change this part of your story? Or will you humbly seek the wisdom of the God who made you, and who freely redeems you to live for him through Jesus Christ?

Now let's move to **THE DAY IN YOUR STORY**. We read about the seventh day, and we wonder what this day is all about. Let's describe it this way: it is a holy holiday.

*IT IS HOLY.* We read in Genesis 2:3, "And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy." For the Jews of the Old Testament, this day was Saturday. For the church of the New Testament, because Jesus rose from the dead on the day we call Sunday, this day is Sunday. Either way, the principle is the same: one day in seven is to be a holy day.

What does it mean to be holy? When something is holy, it is set apart for God's purposes. It is like a special tool or a special piece of clothing. You will use that tool only for certain projects, or you will wear that clothing only on special occasions. They are "set apart" from other tools or other clothes, for the purposes you order for them. In the same way, the seventh day is set apart for the purposes God has prepared for us.

So what does it mean to make this day "holy"? It means the day is first about God, and that means the first priority of the day is to worship God. This day is for our spiritual renewal, and we first receive this spiritual renewal through worship.

Private worship is good. We should worship God every day, as we read the Bible, as we pray, and even as we sing and make music in our hearts and with our lips. There is a sense in which all of life is worship, because everything I do, I do for God's glory, so that whether I work or play or eat or drink or do anything else, I worship God.

Yet while all worship is good, gathered worship is uniquely wonderful. David said in Psalm 122, "I rejoiced with those who said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord.'" If you know Jesus Christ by faith, you are part of the body of Christ - a collection of people made up of many parts and many personalities, but unified by one commitment to the hallowing of God's name, the coming of God's kingdom, and the doing of God's will. In Jesus Christ, we are called to gathered worship, and we are to be committed to gathered worship.

Are we? I must tell you that my heart hurts when I see some of the worship habits of some people who profess a strong commitment to Jesus Christ. We were made to worship, and we have been given a day to do it, and I don't understand why we neglect this blessing.

I was blessed to have parents who gathered for worship with other Christians each Sunday. To this

day, if I am not in worship on Sunday, it feels strange. Even if I must be somewhere else on a Sunday morning, I feel as if something is not quite right. Whether or not you were blessed with parents like mine, you should feel the same way. If you miss this holy blessing - whether here or elsewhere - it should seem weird. Dare I say that it should even feel and seem wrong? I wonder if we so easily exercise our so-called “Christian freedom” with worship that we do not gather as we should. This leads to spiritual weakness, as individuals, and as a church.

What about work? If you must, you must. But must you? Must you?

What about travel? In general, you should be able to shape your travel schedule so that you can participate in gathered worship, wherever you are.

What about sports? Be careful - think of what you are saying. Are you saying that sporting event is more important than the worship of God, with God’s people?

What about illness? It is good to be selfish with germs. But I wonder: do we miss worship with illnesses, then go to school or work, just as sick, the next day?

Do you see the seventh day as a day that must involve gathered worship, or do you live it as a day that might involve gathered worship? If it is a must, you will do everything humanly possible to participate, for you long for the spiritual renewal that is yours, on this holy day.

As well, you will prepare yourself for this gathered worship. You will do this on the sixth day. You will shape your life so that you are physically and spiritually ready to worship. You will put aside your preference to stay up half the night. You will stay away from activities that will wear you out. You will want to prepare your spirit for what you will receive in worship - maybe with good reading or good music, or just an encouraging time with family or friends.

Yet you can keep the day holy through more than gathered worship. On this day, you can be free to spend extra time with the Lord. Maybe you take a season to pray over an issue in your life. Maybe you do some spiritually filling reading. Maybe you discover you have the time to minister to someone else - through ears that listen or hands that serve.

The seventh day is holy - a day set apart for God’s purpose of spiritual renewal in our lives. God’s purpose is also this: *IT IS A HOLY HOLIDAY*. In Genesis 2:3, we read that God “rested” on the seventh day. But this is more than just sitting on the couch. The word here means to “cease” or “stop.” On this day, you do something different from what you normally do.

That is what we do on holidays, don’t we? You don’t do your normal work. You don’t go through your regular routines. You are not a slave to a schedule and a plan. You stop doing what you normally do, so you can do something special. That is what the seventh day is all about.

Yes, this may include a Sunday afternoon nap! But this is more than rest. It is refreshment. The day is for spiritual renewal, and for physical refreshment. We are away from the worries and hassles of the other six days. We take a break from them and do other things, and we trust those worries and hassles will still be there for us on Monday morning.

As I think of how this enters our stories, I think first of the other six days. If we are going to rest on Sunday, we have to ask how wisely and well we are working on the other six days. Does this mean we work 24/7 on those days? No - sleep is a great blessing. But if we are going to have the freedom to be refreshed on Sunday, we must be diligent to work on the other six days.

You know the cycle. You do not get everything done you want to get done. You work on Sunday to catch up. But now you enter the new week exhausted. So you do not work wisely or well in the new week, and you are still behind - maybe more behind. So you try to “catch up” on Sunday again, and the cycle continues.

This applies to our housework, our homework, and all of our work. Am I working wisely and well during the week, so that I am free to receive this blessing of refreshment on Sunday?

That leads to the question we often ask: what can we do or not do on the seventh day? Let’s start with

this: we each need to wrestle with this in our own consciences. While we can encourage each other, I am not your conscience, and you are not mine. Yet we are prone to be proud and foolish, so we must think about this. I like to ask this: does this activity contribute to my physical, mental, and emotional refreshment? Is this something that makes this day a holy holiday, or does it wear me down and wear me out just like the other six days of the week?

What about “commerce” - whether it is shopping or eating out or doing anything that fuels our retail and service culture? Think of it this way: is it convenient, or is it necessary? Convenient is a Big Mac. Necessary is medicine for your child. I am refreshed, when I do commerce only when it is necessary on this holy holiday.

What about work - whether it is in the workplace, or in the home? Ask the question this way: is it obsessive or obligatory? Are you working because you are obsessed about getting that work done? Then don't. Or are you obligated to work by an unsympathetic boss or a real need? I am refreshed, when I do only the work I need to do.

What about sports? It is helpful to remember the difference between sports as competition and sports as recreation. If I am competing, I am not refreshed. If I play to just enjoy the play and the people with me, I am refreshed. If I am watching a game, I may be refreshed - as long as I remember it is only a game.

Yet on Super Bowl Sunday, I will add this about watching. We sports fans should think (and pray!) about how much we watch sports on the seventh day. I do not know how much is too much. I plan to enjoy the Super Bowl tonight. But ask yourself: when the average Sunday is over, have you thought more about sports, or about Jesus Christ?

What about news? I believe we are blessed when we give ourselves a break from the 24/7 clamor of the latest distress and disaster. Must we know everything about everything all the time, or might we rest our minds for a day, and let God rule the world? Why not ignore Fox News, or CNN, or MSNBC, or whoever, for a day?

I realize that in a culture that does not see this as a holy holiday, some of us do not have the freedom we would like for this day. When that is our situation, we should do what we can to keep the concept of the seventh day in our lives. Maybe I worship at a church with a Saturday evening service. Maybe I make my “day off,” a real day off. Instead of living like a hamster in a cage, running and running the race of the proud and the foolish, I seek the holy purposes and real blessings of spiritual renewal and physical refreshment, as much as I can.

Yet as we finish, I want you to hide something else in your heart, and hold something else in your life, as you think about and live out the seventh day. This is a day of “rest and gladness.” In Jesus Christ, we have the hope of everlasting renewal and unending refreshment. So as we make this a special day, we anticipate our special hope - the hope of a new heavens and a new earth, where we will delight forever in our Creator and Redeemer. If you know Jesus Christ today, you have something to celebrate today, and that celebration will renew you spiritually and refresh you physically, as you journey through your story. Will you embrace this celebration?

A non-Jewish man visited the home of a Jew on a Friday evening, as preparations were being made for the seventh day. “Tell me,” the man asked, “what is it that makes everything smell so good in this house every Friday night?” The Jew looked around and saw the Sabbath candles, the Sabbath loaves, and a cup of wine. He said, “The Sabbath itself is the seasoning that makes everything taste so good.”

The seventh day is God's design for us. It is his blessed seasoning for us. We gather to worship God, and we are renewed in our spirits. We use the day to be refreshed in every way, so we can face the first day of the new week. Why would we be so proud and foolish to resist or resent this? May we season our lives with the wonderful taste of this day.