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Isaiah 55:1-9

Cultivating Play and Rest: Letting Go of Exhaustion as a Status Symbol and Productivity as Self-Worth

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Isaiah 55:1-9 Common English Bible

All of you who are thirsty, come to the water! Whoever has no money, come, buy food and eat! Without money, at no cost, buy wine and milk! Why spend money for what isn’t food, and your earnings for what doesn’t satisfy? Listen carefully to me and eat what is good; enjoy the richest of feasts. Listen and come to me; listen, and you will live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful loyalty to David. Look, I made him a witness to the peoples, a prince and commander of peoples. Look, you will call a nation you don’t know, a nation you don’t know will run to you because of the Lord your God, the holy one of Israel, who has glorified you. Seek the Lord when he can still be found; call him while he is yet near. Let the wicked abandon their ways and the sinful their schemes. Let them return to the Lord so that he may have mercy on them, to our God, because he is generous with forgiveness. My plans aren’t your plans, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. Just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my plans than your plans.

All of you who are thirsty, come to the water! In the southwestern United States, where the humidity is low, you can be thirsty and not even know it. Your perspiration evaporates so quickly that you do not realize you are becoming dehydrated. So, whether you feel thirsty or not, it is a good practice to drink a little bit of water as often as you can. At the Grand Canyon, there are signs placed along the trails that remind you to stop and drink water. The signs say “Stop! Drink water. You are thirsty, whether you realize it or not.” That is hard for me to understand. How can it be that we don’t realize our own thirst?

Isaiah is speaking a truth to us that we need to hear at every moment of our lives. Everyone who is thirsty gets water. Everyone who is hungry is invited to eat. It is like a grocery store where everything is free. Where people who stand by the side of the road with cardboard signs that say, “Will work for food” push carts full of groceries through the checkout line, paying only with a smile and a wave. Isaiah says that we are spending money for things that we do not need in the first place. We are spending money on what is not bread and we are working for what does not satisfy. We need a new diet of good and rich food.

Have you ever visited someone’s home and they ask you what you want to drink? If you weren’t intending to stay very long, you may say you aren’t thirsty, even if you are. Sometimes the host persists. “Are you sure?” “How about a cup of coffee or a glass of water?” You say, no, you are fine. Isaiah is leaning across the coffee table and saying to us, “Hey. Stop it. Whether or not you are thirsty, whether or not you are hungry, you need what God has to give.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Isaiah is talking to people who had given up hope. They had been conquered, they have had to leave their homes. They are struggling. Isaiah is giving them an image of a meal of wine and milk that is beyond their expectation and hope. Isaiah is inviting everyone to come to the waters, and all those who are hungry but without money, to come and buy and eat.

Isaiah says, “Listen carefully to me…Listen and come to me; listen, and you will live.” A relationship with God based on God’s steadfast love for us is our greatest need and the richest nourishment of our lives. All of those things in life that we chase after that we think will make us happy, those are just wasted calories without any nutrition. We crave satisfaction, so we go, go, go to fill that hole inside of us. We buy what we think will give us satisfaction. We try to make other people happy because we think it will make us happy. And in the end we are drained and still thirsting for more. Any way of life that turns us away from God is a way of life that leads to our starvation and death.

All of you who are thirsty, come to the water! Maybe Isaiah received this word from God after visiting a market with people rushing to buy, struggling to sell, and some begging for a handout so they might too taste their daily bread. We have needs, we even say it in the Lord’s Prayer: give us this day our daily bread. Isaiah reminds us that what we really need is God. But we rush around seeking something that can never fully satisfy. God calls us into deeper fellowship, God has the best wine and milk and the best bread available. But we rush past God seeking to buy what God has already provided us freely. Only in fellowship with God are we truly fulfilled. Give ear and come to me, hear me, that your soul may live. We are truly alive only in covenant with the God in whom we live and move and have our being. We are called to be the people of God. In our lives we will struggle, but we must always remember that we are people of God and that we are called to a life of joy.

We live in the world and we participate in its problems. We work and pay taxes but that is not all there is to our lives. We are God’s own people and through everything, good times and bad times, we are called to remember that we are constantly called to come back to God. No matter what we have done, we can and will be forgiven. God loves us and is always with us. This Lent may we focus on being with God and spending time with God.

There is a Hebrew myth that an angel comes down from heaven when a child is born, takes the child under her wing, and shares the story of the Jewish people, their call into being by God, their trials and tribulations, and their covenant with God. Then the angel places a finger on the upper lip of the child, creating the indentation that each human being has there, and says, “Forget.” That child then journeys through life trying to remember. This is the story of our lives. We forget God, and like the prodigal sons and daughters, we go off and seek our own way. We search for God in the far country when God waits for us at home. At some point in our lives, we wake up to the presence of something more and attempt to find our way home.[[2]](#footnote-2) The journey is over when we remember that God lives at the center of our being.

Lent is an opportunity for us to think about how we have wandered away from God, how life has lost its meaning in pursuit of a promotion or raise, how we have gotten buried under the demands of economic and social status. Lent is a chance for us to hear again God’s offer of love and relationship with us as the true way for our lives.

All of you who are thirsty, come to the water! We are a nation of exhausted and overstressed adults raising overscheduled children. When we have spare time, we fill it full because we are desperate to find joy and meaning in our lives. We need to cultivate sleep and play and let go of exhaustion as a status symbol and productivity as self-worth. We need to go on a walk for no reason as we listen to the birds and the wind. Or go to a movie, read a book, or go out with your friends. Or take a nap. Not getting enough sleep is linked to diabetes, heart disease, obesity and depression. Go to sleep. We think that it’s a sign of how busy we are or how productive we are to work late into the night, but driving while you are sleepy is as dangerous as driving while intoxicated. We think that we can push through, that we can handle it. But we can’t.

I wonder what you think is going really well in your life. Maybe you get enough sleep, you work out, you eat healthy food, you cook, you take time off? You are present with your kids, you have a sense of control over your money? You have meaningful work that doesn’t consume you, you have time to piddle, and time with family and close friends? You have time to just hang out? All of those things are ingredients for joy and meaning.[[3]](#footnote-3) It is holy and good to be quiet and happy. I hope that the ingredients for joy and meaning in your life include play and rest. Take a nap today. Take something off your to-do list. Say no. Choose play and rest. Drink from the water God is offering. You are thirsty, whether you realize it or not. Just drink. It will give you life, thanks be to God, Amen.

1. ##### From [Feasting on the Word: Year C, Volume 2: Lent through Eastertide](https://www.amazon.com/Feasting-Word-Year-through-Eastertide-ebook/dp/B0055D788Y/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=feasting+on+the+word+year+c+lent&qid=1553209832&s=gateway&sr=8-1-spell). David L. Bartlett, Barbara Brown Bartlett, et al. Oct 12, 2009

   [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. ##### From [Feasting on the Word: Year C, Volume 2: Lent through Eastertide](https://www.amazon.com/Feasting-Word-Year-through-Eastertide-ebook/dp/B0055D788Y/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=feasting+on+the+word+year+c+lent&qid=1553209832&s=gateway&sr=8-1-spell). David L. Bartlett, Barbara Brown Bartlett, et al. Oct 12, 2009

   [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. List from Brene Brown. The Gifts of Imperfection. P. 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)