



“Nice to see you really resting for a change”

I've never really been able to explain Hebrews 4:11 which says, “make every effort to enter his rest,” because if resting requires effort how can it be a rest? It didn't make any sense.

But then Covid-19 struck and I suddenly had my answer, because the virus forcefully stopped my routine. I had no choice but to stop it too. But it took real effort to stop, because if I hear a church member's in trouble or in hospital, forty eight years of pastoral instinct has me automatically jumping into my car and shooting off to visit. Or if I need help and wise counsel to answer a need in church I automatically drag my wife off to a coffee shop to get her input. But the virus put a stop to all that, and with no leeway given either.

It's been tough making the transition, because it flies right in the face of who I've been and how I've operated for most of my life. But suddenly it made sense of that verse in Hebrews 4.

May I explain.

If I'm reading Hebrews 3 and 4 correctly, I have no right calling myself a Christian if I'm not trusting God with everything in my life, large and small. Hebrews 4:16 is very specific on this point. It tells me that whenever I'm “in a time of need” I should “approach the throne of grace with confidence,” because “mercy and grace” await me when I do. I'm guaranteed “mercy,” for instance, if I've blown it in my thoughts or reactions in some way, and I'm equally guaranteed the power of “grace” to help me think straight, act wisely, and resist the temptation to do something stupid and damaging. I can even trust him to find something I've lost. Large or small, I can trust him.

And it all sounds very encouraging and comforting, but the underlying point is that God is offering me no choice and no leeway but applying Hebrews 4:16 to every part of my life, large and small. It's his will. He wants me exposing every situation I'm in to him, in total trust that he's listening and ready to help. And if I don't believe that or act on it I'm no better off than those idiotic, prickly Israelites.

Any idea in my head, then, that I can cope on my own strength, my own wits, and my own wisdom and feelings has to come to a total halt. And God is offering me no choice and no leeway in that. His reaction to Israel trying to sort themselves out was an unequivocal and unyielding, “They shall never enter my rest.” And I don't want God saying that of me.

But what that takes is some real effort on my part, because when faced with an impossible or trying situation my brain is screaming at me to either fret or fix (or fret until I fix). But God says, “No; you've got to stop doing that.” And totally stop it too, no choice - and no leeway given either.

But I'm thinking, “I can't do that. My brain is wired to fret and fix.” But then along comes Covid-19, and suddenly I can't “do church,” and I can't visit with family or church members, or babysit our grandchildren. And being a vulnerable Senior I can't even volunteer in the community, either. It's been a real shock to my system. I've never been forced to stop like this before, other than being confined to bed when sick. But here I am feeling good and ready to do my part and help out, but I can't, I'm not allowed to.

It means having to consciously resist my creative juices that drive me into wanting to do, do, do. I have to resist the guilt that I'm not accomplishing something useful. I even have to resist the need to socialize except by phone or video. I've discovered it takes a lot of effort to rest.

And isn't that the way it is in trusting God too? It takes real effort to resist and transition from trusting in myself to trusting him. But it's no different to having to line up seven feet apart in the freezing cold outside a supermarket, and not talk to people. When you've got no choice it's amazing how you adjust. Well, God is offering us no choice when it comes to trusting him either. Hebrews 3 and 4 are telling me that total trust is the only option for Christians. It's the only way we “enter his rest.”

But Covid-19 has taught me that it's possible to stop old habits and transition to new ones when we have no choice. It means I really can rest and trust God instead of going with my instincts to fret and fix. I've gone against my instincts with Covid-19, so why not with trusting God too?

It takes effort and a conscious choice, yes, to change to “entering God's rest” by trusting him in everything, large and small. But thanks to this crazy virus I'm learning such change is possible. So, am I actually learning to rest, at last, now that I recognize in Hebrews I have no option and no choice but to trust, but also knowing it's possible?

In which case I can almost hear God chuckling, “And about time too, my boy. Nice to see you really resting for a change.”

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