

WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH



SERMON

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God's Handiwork

Dr. Jo Forrest

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The writer of the Narnia series and English theologian, C.S. Lewis, called Psalm 19 “the greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world.”¹ Our Protestant Reformer, John Calvin, admired the way this psalter describes the heavens as the “preacher” of God’s glory, always speaking.

Our sermon series, *Living in the Majesty of God*, honors these words from an ancient writer drawing us to the heavens and to scripture to understand God’s desire for our lives.

Before Vinay Thomas and I read an interpretation of this psalter, please join me as I pray.

Days pass and the years vanish, and we walk sightless among miracles. Lord, fill our eyes with seeing and our minds with knowing. Let there be moments when your presence, like lightning, illumines the darkness in which we walk. Breathe your spirit into these words that we, the simple, clay vessels that you formed, might grasp your glory and give our lives in gratitude.² Amen.

Psalm 19

The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims God's handiwork.
Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1986), 63.

² Adapted from a Jewish prayer.

Search both day and night and watch for God's glory ...

There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;
yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.

Look to the horizon to hear a word about eternity...

In the heavens God has set a tent for the sun,
which comes out like a beloved from a wedding canopy,
and like a strong athlete runs its course with joy.

Look to the sunrise and enjoy God's forever-promise...

Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them;
and nothing is hid from its heat.

Look to the seasons and live God's rhythm...

The law of God is perfect, reviving the soul;
the decrees of God are sure, making wise the simple;
the precepts of God are right, rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of God is clear,
enlightening the eyes;

Look to creation's order and accept its wisdom...

the fear of God is pure, enduring forever;
the ordinances of God are true
and righteous altogether.

More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey, and drippings of
the honeycomb.

Look to the word and taste their sweetness...

Moreover by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.
But who can detect their errors?
Clear me from hidden faults.

Look to grace and know its forgiveness...

Keep back your servant also from the insolent;
do not let them have dominion over me.
Then I shall be blameless,
and innocent of great transgression.

Look to God's covenant and know its love...

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation
of my heart
be acceptable to you, O God, my rock and my
redeemer.³

³ adapted from Mucky Paws, <http://www.nkchurch.org.uk/index.php/mucky-paws>

The numbers 6, 15, and 168 bear something in common, more than simply as integers in mathematical terms.

Some lawyers and accountants will parse their hourly billing rate into six-minute increments. No such thing as a quick phone call.

In my former industry, as a consultant, I tracked my days in 15-minute increments.

How did I spend my time? Was that business development call worth it? Why does a complaint and poor-quality cost so much? What value did we create? Time was the only commodity we could monetize to generate revenue. Ingrained from several decades of measuring my time, I am ever aware of the cost of meetings and any processes that generate lots of paper.

The number 168 involves a similar pursuit.

An admired leadership guru, who teaches young MBAs, asks them to think of a week as 168 hours. Among the finite number of hours/weeks available to them, how many hours will they sleep, spend at work, and leave for other pursuits. Although he seeks to inspire them to give their hours to what they value, his focus on 168 dances around and against the

concept of time as money and how many hours can you work for profit.⁴

The number 4,000 captured attention last year. Anyone who looks at the whole of life with a measuring stick might know this number.

Oliver Burkman's best-selling book opens with this first sentence: "The average human life span is absurdly, terrifyingly, insultingly short." If you live for 80 years, you can check off about 4,000 weeks. Thus, the title; *4,000 Weeks: Time Management for Mortals*. He wrote a column entitled "This Column Will Change your Life," and a previous book, *The Antidote: Happiness for People Who Can't Stand Positive Thinking*.

You get the gist from just his titles. He breaks down barriers with humor and sarcasm before shining a spotlight on accepted norms about life that actually diminish our quality of life. Philosophers ranging from Nietzsche and Seneca to Rod Stewart and Danielle Steel pepper his writing as he pokes readers to accept all these time-money-efficiency models are either impossible or, in his opinion, will lead to misery.

Burkman wants us to stop trying so hard. "Nobody in the history of humanity has ever achieved 'work-life balance,'

⁴ Harry Kraemer remains one of the most respected clinical professors at The Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University. This mathematician by training and former CEO of Baxter wrote a book with 168 in the title based upon his lectures.

whatever that might be,” he writes, “and you certainly won’t get there by copying the ‘six things successful people do before 7 a.m.’” Besides, if your motive is to get more done, you will only invite more to do, and the never-ending quest that leads to misery.

The pandemic broke open this vicious cycle. For weeks, it shattered any semblance of routine. Do you recall the ways Monday bled into Tuesday and morphed into Blursday? We lost track of the day of the week in either too much to do with zooms and school and too little of any routine, resulting in extreme fatigue for some and terrible boredom for others.

Hovering above all of this, or maybe getting under our skin, we faced our mortality from a potentially lethal virus. The pandemic taught us: the way we order time may not lead to a healthy life. When given the chance, many workers abandoned the grind. Unspoken most of the time, the pandemic reminded us; we will all die.

The point of living is not to be the most efficient about it, endure it, or get through it.

The ancient Israelites learned to order their lives to survive trauma. God rescued them within their trauma. Those Israelites, who wandered in the wilderness, probably encountered the same disequilibrium as the pandemic – one day bleeds into another with a monotony to numb anyone from knowing where they were or were headed.

God rescues them from losing their minds in an endless amount of time by intervening with God's own creation to order their lives.

You've heard me comment before, rather than teach children the Ten Commandments, more rules for them to rebel against, teach them the Ten Best Ways. This description of the behaviors God gave to Moses also appeals to adults. These ten best ways expand our lives rather than confine them.

God teaches the Israelites the best way to live is to keep the Sabbath holy. Keep it holy, meaning separate this day from the other days of the week. Just as God rested after creation, God's creatures need rest from work.

For observant Jews, on the sixth day, from the time the sun sets, they rest in the quiet of night. When the sun rises the next morning, they rise in the light of day to merely enjoy the day. God invites us into this rhythm with sunsets that put the horizon on fire. That same sun that traversed the noon sky in blinding yellow, once it sinks lower in the horizon, and the clouds move across, refracting the water and air, paint an ever-changing portrait of God.

As if God says through sunset, "step away from the toil of your life and into me. Rest." When the sun rises in the morning, light teasing the distant horizon from dark blue to pale grey with vibrant pinks mixed in, it's as if God says "wake up and be

amazed at what else I bring to life within you. Give me this sabbath. Come play with me today.”

God did not pepper this invitation with rules, nor should we. Lean into what you would enjoy and be with God.

Psalms 19 joins together the writer’s awe of God’s ability to move the heavenly bodies across the sky, always speaking, to the order prescribed in scripture. Life is so simple: goodness flows from being attuned to what God created and desires from us.

The movement of the sun guided the ancient Israelites, but in our modern world, it just won’t work when the mortgage is as regular as the full moon. Steeped in the notion that life is a zero-sum game, why waste any part of it without creating value? That’s our paradox.

Work, soccer, shopping, and errands all persuade us that we don’t have enough time to do all of what is expected. How can one possibly give away time to merely be? I hear your complaints about being overscheduled, again. I see those photos you post on social media. The sunrise over the oceans and sunsets off your back deck.

This is the leap of faith. Go outside and watch God do it all over again. Gaze at God’s handiwork, and rest long enough in awe of the ever-changing and expanding light of creation.

Remember that you are just as fearfully and wonderfully made as those heavenly bodies.

Do the most unthinkable, lose yourself in rest and forget about time until your stomach churns and you decide for lunch. Let your heavy eyelids lure you to sleep rather stare into some glowing blue screen past midnight. Take delight in the intimacy with God. Hear God speak. Let God calm your weary heart, receive grace, and allow God to imagine inside of you what might unfold.

When you entrust your time to rest with the one who created time, the most amazing thing happens, your life expands. This is not sacrifice. This is another gift from God.

The other days of your week, those filled with work, become richer. You encounter God more. Your imagination sparks. The more you experience God's abundance on that day of rest, the more you will keep this rhythm throughout your life.

In a world filled with conflict and rage over who is winning in the games of money and influence, and arguing over truth, God calls us to retreat from these score-keeping and divisive schemes. When you lose yourself long enough for God to find you, you experience God's generous, eternal gift. And then you will find yourself giving forward what you received. God's generosity to us encourages our gratitude to give as well. Then you will know you too are a part of God's grand handiwork.



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2040 Washington Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15241
412-835-6630
www.westminster-church.org