

Renewed in the Lord

Rev. Taek Kim

Scripture: Isaiah 40:30-31

³⁰Even youths will faint and be weary,
and the young will fall exhausted;
³¹but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint.

How long have you ever gone without a day off or personal vacation? For those of you who are retired, and are doing side jobs, can you remember the longest you've gone without a day off? One friend told me while his business was in jeopardy of closing, he worked 7 months without a day off just to save it.

In the church I grew up in, the Korean Sr. Pastor who retired years ago boasted of taking only about a months worth of personal vacation during the 21 years he served the church. I guess he forgot about the one commandment about observing the Sabbath! I knew it wasn't good for him or his family, though it seemed good for his congregation.

I don't know why, but not until I was preparing this sermon during the past week did I remember the longest time I went without a day off. It was during my college years when I was very energetic, enthusiastic, and driven to do my best for God in everything I did. When I began my college studies, I started working as a children's and youth pastor for a church in Flint, Michigan. And when I was home for work every other three-month period, working 9-5, Monday through Friday in the Troy and Pontiac areas, I drove the 1-hour one-way trip to Flint to continue my part-time job as a pastor. I continued to do this for 2 ½ years without one day off. After changing majors and continuing my ministry position from Detroit for 1 more year, I took a much needed six-month vacation before beginning my theological studies in Washington, D.C.

But no doubt those 2 ½ years of working like that took a toll. I remember many times while driving back and forth from Troy to Flint as a youth working, fighting my body from falling asleep by pinching myself, turning up the radio, and even slapping my face. One day, and the last day that I tried to keep driving while falling asleep was on a Sunday morning on the way to Flint, I fell asleep at the wheel. Fortunately, by the grace of God, I woke up before running into a semi-truck on I-75 going about 85 miles per hour, swerving and almost losing control of my car. Thank God that he helped me with quick reflexes and second-nature steering techniques for high-speed emergencies. That sure woke me up and taught me a lesson I would never forget.

I could have killed myself, and worse, someone else. From then on, if I ever was tired, and even if I were to show up late for church service, I'd stop at a rest area and take a 10-15 minute nap before going on.

Well the lessons I learned after leaving the Korean church setting was to make sure to honor the Sabbath, though not a Sunday for ministers, but another day to make sure to take care of myself so I could be renewed and be my best for God as a husband, father, son, brother, friend, and pastor.

So I can relate to the verse in Isaiah that says, "Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall..." Today, not only are youth and adults growing weary and tired from the busyness of life, but I also see children with overscheduled lives that cause them to say that they need a vacation, just like their parents do.

For some periods of time, we can go and go, work and work, and do so much with seemingly unlimited energy. But God did not design our minds, bodies, and spirits to exist without rest. Some push the limits and say that whatever we put our minds to; we can achieve what seems impossible.

As our world becomes more productive, and as we work to match the speed of the demands in our lives, and as most of us carry cell phones and communicate by email regularly, we can easily become so busy that we are constantly feeling worn-down or stressed-out.

With all honesty, some people actually do not have the choice of having a day off, at least for some time or a long time. They simply cannot afford to take days off, having another job when they finish their main one.

I remember my mom and dad working at one point in our young lives when I and my 3 siblings were probably eating away our parents paychecks. My dad worked full-time as an orthopedic technician, my mom worked in food services with Big Boy, and my dad opened a shoe repair place that was open after he got off his regular job until 9 or so at night and then all weekend. I remember going to work with him on the weekends, going to get lunch for us, and helping as I could around the shoe repair store. They worked so hard!

When I asked him one day why he was working so hard, he told me that they wanted to take care of us and provide for us as best as possible. They said they wanted to give more to the church that had plans to grow and build a new building. As I was growing up in my home church, we rented other churches for many years, at least two churches that I can recall. At last, when I was in high school they built the church that still exists in Troy. It's the Korean United Methodist Church of Troy. From a fairly good size church, now they have two large sanctuaries for the Korean speaking and English-speaking congregations, youth worship service, and children's worship service. And they are planning to build more since they are running out of space, for they are now not only Korean, but also of different cultures.

I thought my dad was ridiculous at one point to work so hard to give it away rather than keep it all. But in time I understood more and more.

When I realized what it meant and what fruit was produced from having our own church, looking at the first youth praise band created when I was a youth, the amazing things they did for children, youth, young adults, and the entire congregation, I realized that there was more going on that gave such passion, energy, and generosity that would typically wear the normal person out, even the most energetic youth.

When I think about my parents and the other adults that worked so hard, I know it was not by their own strength they all worked so hard and did what they did in sacrificing for God's church and the future generations, it was God's!

We can say how we did something, earned something, achieved something, but in the end it is God who gave us everything and the abilities to do them. And the work is not done after one project, but it's ongoing when it comes to building the kingdom of God.

Though we need breaks, what amazes me is that when we wait on the Lord, we are granted divine strength and renewal.

By waiting on the Lord does not mean sitting down idle. In fact, that can mean the very opposite. When waiting, it can involve fervent prayer, even working harder as you wait for God to act and bless the work you're faithfully doing.

Even when you're feeling down and out, hurting, or even recovering from something, there is renewal yet to be found.

And though you may have heard of this story, but it's worth repeating to emphasize how God can work through someone in our lives and through you to help find renewal. The school system in a large city had a program to help children keep up with their schoolwork during stays in the city's hospitals. One day a teacher who was assigned to the program received a routine call asking her to visit a particular child. She took the child's name and room number and talked briefly with the child's regular class teacher. "We're studying nouns and adverbs in his class now," the regular teacher said, "and I'd be grateful if you could help him understand them so he doesn't fall too far behind." The hospital program teacher went to see the boy that afternoon. No one had mentioned to her that the boy had been badly burned and was in great pain. Upset at the sight of the boy, she stammered as she told him, "I've been sent by your school to help you with nouns and adverbs." When she left she felt she hadn't accomplished much. But the next day, a nurse asked her, "What did you do to that boy?" The teacher felt she must have done something wrong and began to apologize. "No, no," said the nurse. "You don't know what I mean. We've been worried about that little boy, but ever since yesterday, his whole attitude has changed. He's fighting back, responding to treatment. It's as though he's decided to live." Two weeks later the boy explained that he had completely given up hope until the teacher arrived. Everything changed when he came to a simple realization. He expressed it this way:

"They wouldn't send a teacher to work on nouns and adverbs with a dying boy, would they?"
(Bits & Pieces, July 1991.)

The second verse of today's Scripture reading tell us that "...those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."

By waiting on the Lord, you have faith and hope. So as you wait on the Lord as you do what you need to do in life, work as you need to work, press through what you have to press through, remember that as you truly wait on the Lord that renewal will come. It can come through a verse that God reminds you of through the Holy spirit, it can come through a song, an experience as you pause to pray or admire God's creation, maybe a word from a friend or even a stranger, or maybe through an act of kindness, generosity, and love, whether done unto you or you having acted for someone else.

Renewal in the Lord is our hope in his abilities in us, that when we completely trust in him with our lives, then we can trust that we are walking in his ways and walking towards the life and example he desires us to walk and live.

All the money we need does not take care of all our worries in life. Maybe they take care of some of them, but the feeling of security you'd hope to get from financial security is found not in money. It is found in hoping in God and placing our trust in him for our entire lives. That is true security.

Many times, we can feel stressed-out, frustrated, or weighed-down by the thoughts of not living up to our own or other's expectations. We may feel that we are not doing what we should be doing or that we are not doing as good of a job as we should.

Many times we are taught that being number one or the best at something is most important. We are taught that either we must perform better or do better than last year in order to feel good about ourselves or about life. We are also taught to set our expectations so high that it's almost certain we feel miserable for not meeting them or worse, knowing that we'll probably never meet them.

Renewal in the Lord is getting off the cycle of performance-based self-esteem, self-respect, or self-worth. Renewal in the Lord is trusting in God rather than doing your best; about seeking his will and asking God to do his will in and through your life.

In God's economy, just trying counts for much! And just hoping in God counts for much more than you can imagine. I read again Isaiah chapter 40, verse 31, "...those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."

How all of us, like children, desire to please our parents, know that we are doing as they say, to make them proud, and one day hear, “Well done my son/daughter. You have made me so proud.” This can create for a lifetime of self-confidence, self-worth, and self-respect. It is not because of what we have done, but because of what someone has said to us.

God has told us that when we place our hope in him, when we look to God for our lives, he will renew in us a spirit with his strength; whether we are healthy or ill, whether we are wealthy or poor, whether we are trouble-free or filled with trials and tribulations, or whether we are feeling loved or incredibly lonely.

You can tell the difference between the person who has placed their hope in the Lord and the one who has not.

If you want to find renewal for your spirit today, begin by placing your hope, the hope for your life and all that is in your life in the Lord. Seek and ye shall find (Matthew 7:7) and hope in God and you will be renewed in spirit in the Lord. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Next week you will receive my last sermon, as June 13 will be my last Sunday. I pray that my messages have blessed you ever since they’ve been mailed out to you. You will be greatly missed, and my prayers go with each of you.

Blessings,
Pastor Taek