

Theophilia

Isaiah 55:1-9

INTRODUCTION

- A. The biggest threat to our national parks isn't polluted water, inconsiderate campers, or wildfires. It's the time we spend in front of a screen.
1. A couple of researchers recently studied tourism in the US national parks, and found that park visits grew steadily over the course of 57 years, from 1930 to 1987. Then, over the next 16 years, visitation dropped by 25 percent—a serious and significant decline.
 2. So, what's the reason?
 - a. Biologist Oliver Pergams and research associate Patricia Zaradic determined that 97.5 percent of the drop was due to the ever-increasing time we are spending surfing the Internet, playing video games, and watching movies and television shows.
 - b. In the year 2003, the average American was spending 327 more hours in front of the screen than he was 16 years earlier.
 3. The July 5, 2006 issue of *The Washington Post* reported that Pergams and Zaradic have even coined a term for this increased time in front of the screen: Videophilia.
 - a. It's a good word, one that literally means "love of video." The Greek word *philos* means love and has given rise to word such as philanthropy (love of mankind), philosophy (love of wisdom), and Philadelphia (the city of brotherly love).
 - b. Videophilia, according to these researchers, is "the new human tendency to focus on sedentary activities involving electronic media."
 - 1) Video games, television shows, DVDs, e-mail, Ims and the World Wide Web are all screen-based sedentary attractions, and they are sucking up an increasing amount of our time.
 - 2) You don't have to be completely addicted to video to see that your screen time has soared in the past 20 years.
 4. The problem is, if you're spending an extra hour a day in front of a computer or television, you're not spending that time outdoors. And if you're not out doors, you're not in a park. And if you're not in a park, you're not deepening your passion for nature. And if you're not feeling passionate about nature, you're not as likely to practice environmentally responsible behavior.
 - a. Pergams says, "If people are less interested in nature, they're going to become less interested in conservation."
 - b. To summarize: Our love of electronic technology, according to Pergams and Zaradic, causes us to prefer the couch instead of the country.
- B. But, our spiritual lives, the problem is somewhat different. A little sedentary-ness might be a good thing.
1. Truth is, we stay so busy in a variety of activities, indoors and out, that we don't sit down, gather our thoughts, quiet our hearts, and spend time with God.
 2. Our videophilia, scrapbooking-*philia*, iPod-*philia*, movie-*philia* and sports-*philia* are all working together to distract us from the most important love of all: Theophilia. That is, quite simply, "love of God."
 - a. In tonight's text, the prophet Isaiah challenges us to "Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near" (v 6).
 - 1) Really, it's an invitation to repent—to turn away from a love of frantic activity, and turn toward the love of God.
 - 2) Isaiah says at verse 7: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

- b. Those words seem odd to us, because we don't think of our various loves, our "philiias," as being particularly sinful.
 - 1) You know that they aren't—in and of themselves—but when they crowd God from the picture, there are serious problems.
 - 2) Nothing in life is to be more vital than our relationship with God:
 - a) When Satan tempted Jesus to worship him, the Lord quotes Deut 6:13: "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve" (Mt 4:10).
 - b) When a lawyer asked Jesus about the greatest commandment, Jesus replies: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Mt 22:37).
 - 3) Tonight, let us look at steps to make such devotion to God a reality in our lives!

STEP ONE: TAKE A REST

- A. Just a few chapters over from this passage, Isaiah rebukes the people of his day for not taking a Sabbath rest: Is 58:13-14.
- B. I don't want anyone to misunderstand me and say that I believe the Sabbath is still binding—I do not!
- C. However, the Sabbath was quite important in the Old Testament:
 - 1. Ex 20:8-11.
 - 2. "Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work. It is a Sabbath to the LORD in all your dwelling places" (Lev 23:3).
 - 3. Why did God institute the Sabbath in the first place?
 - a. God, because he had made man, knew that man needed a day of rest. Man needs time to clear his mind, refresh himself, and spend time with God.
 - b. Do you recall what Jesus says about the Sabbath? When the Pharisees saw Jesus' disciples plucking heads of grain on the Sabbath, Jesus responds, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mk 2:27).
 - c. The New Testament also speaks of a Sabbath rest: "So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his" (Heb 4:9-10).
- D. While the Sabbath is not binding today, we find a principle of resting in the New Testament:
 - 1. As the Twelve return from their "limited commission," we read, "The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. And he said to them, 'Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.' For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat" (Mk 6:30-31).
 - 2. When Jesus heard that John the Baptist had been killed, "he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself" (Mt 14:13).
- E. Unfortunately, our society rewards hard-driving people who are focused on their work seven days a week, and our technology allows us to be constantly connected to the workplace through computers, cell phones and BlackBerrys.
 - 1. Youth sports practices are scheduled Monday through Saturday, with Sunday mornings no longer off limits for competitive play.
 - 2. Our consumer-driven culture has gone into overdrive, and it seems as though many stores are now operating 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.
- F. If we want to love God, we have to rest.
 - 1. Why should we rest in order to love God?
 - a. We need time off to consider the greatness of God: In Psalm 4, David speaks to his enemies and says:
 - 1) "Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent" (4:4).
 - 2) "Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!" (Ps 46:10). We have had a tendency to take this passage greatly out of context:

- a) The context is one of war, and the psalmist is encouraging his fellow Israelites to take refuge in God even though a great army is coming.
 - b) God says, “Stop defending yourselves. I’ll take care of that.”
 - c) But, does the principle not greatly apply to our lives? Stop trying to do everything ourselves and realize what God has done and is doing for us.
- b. We need time for worship.
 - 1) We have become so rushed in this society that we barely have time for worship.
 - 2) Look around you. Where is everyone? Is it not the case that many are not present tonight because they are so rushed that other interests have crowded God from their lives?
 - c. We need to find time to study the Word of God.
 - 1) Scripture urges us to find time to study these words of God. Notice what God says about his future kings: “It [the law] shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes” (Deut 17:19).
 - 2) The results of not finding that time to study are serious. Notice what wisdom says: Prov 1:29-33.
2. Shall we take the time necessary to cultivate a relationship with God?

STEP TWO: PRAY

- A. Isaiah encourages his audience: “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near” (v 6).
- B. You understand why prayer is so important in cultivating a relationship with God: It is our communication with him.
 1. God has communicated with us in a very limited sense through nature, and he has fully revealed his will to us in Scripture.
 2. Relationships, however, are two-way communication, and prayer provides the opportunity we have to communicate with God.
- C. We have a tendency, I fear, to view prayer simply as something formal and ritualistic.
 1. While we need to pray with the utmost respect and reverence (God deserves nothing less), we can pray in a very intimate sense as well.
 2. Every prayer I find in Scripture is wrapped in respect and reverence, and there are many in which the petitioners also talked quite personally to God.
 - a. “You, O LORD, are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head” (Ps 3:3).
 - b. “Give merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by” (Ps 57:1).
 - c. Notice the personal nature of these prayers:
 - 1) The psalmists do not pray that God is good but so far above them that he is unconcerned with their plight.
 - 2) Rather, they pray to God and use quite intimate terms—me, my, I, and you.
 - a) It wasn’t that God was simply the God of Israel or of any other people, but he was their God personally.
 - b) We understand that God cares greatly for us: Peter urges his readers to cast “all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you” (1 Pt 4:7).
 - c) God cares about each of us individually—he cares enough to be concerned with our concerns and to hear our prayers.
- D. I know that we are so very busy, and I know from my own experience that sometimes it seems that we don’t have time for prayer. Those are both the times that we need prayer the most and the times when we must make time for prayer.
 1. Jesus made time for prayer:
 - a. “In these days [Jesus] went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God” (Lk 6:12).
 - b. “About eight days after these sayings [Jesus] took with him Peter and John and

James and went up on the mountain to pray. And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white” (Lk 9:28-29).

2. C. S. Lewis said, “The moment you wake up each morning, all your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning consists in shoving it all back; in listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting that other, larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in.”
 3. John Bunyan said, “He who runs from God in the morning will scarcely find him the rest of the day.”
 4. Martin Luther said, “If I should neglect prayer but a single day, I should lose a great deal of the fire of faith.”
- E. Shall we lose that “fire of faith,” or shall we kindle it through prayer?

STEP THREE: REPENT

- A. “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (vv. 7-9).
- B. When I first read this text, it seemed so odd that God would wait and put repentance at the very end of this passage.
 1. Before we get to this call to repentance, God calls on the Israelites to come to him and receive a multitude of blessings.
 2. Since all these blessings are dependent on repentance, why does God wait until the very end to mention repentance?
 - a. Repentance is the climax of this passage.
 - b. This is the point that God really wants to drive home: if we love him, if we want a relationship with him, we have no option but to repent.
- C. We understand the absolute necessity of repentance.
 1. “I will judge you, O house of Israel, everyone according to his ways, declares the Lord GOD. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord GOD; so turn, and live” (Ezek 18:30-32)
 2. “Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19-20).
- D. How badly do we want a relationship with God? Are we willing to give up whatever in our lives is keeping us from a close relationship with him? Do you need to come to him in repentance tonight?