



The Breathless Pursuit of Receiving



Have you ever noticed the curious affinity Scripture has for irony and contrast?

Irony and contrast, two things out of a myriad of wonderfully odd and mysterious ways that reality is structured. Take irony: The Pharisees who sat atop the religious leadership of Israel back in Jesus's day, killing the God who had made the foundational basis of how they were to obey and worship Him. What Irony. How Jesus, God without blemish or blame, who offered these very men the great gift of life and existence, was slapped, spit on, scourged and "hated without reason" (Psalm 69:4) by these very men. What irony. On and on the scripture drips with irony and contrast. **Things on the surface, which appear to be the case, differ radically from actual reality.**

And what about contrast, "A thing or person having qualities strikingly different from one another?" For example, Jesus in his human form "having no beauty or majesty to attract us to him..." (Isaiah 53:2) contrasted with who He is in Revelation 1:16-17 when John collapsed in front of him as "though dead" because of His incredible power and majesty. Or the contrast in Hebrews 4:11, "make every effort to enter the rest." Make every effort ("a vigorous or determined attempt" and "a strenuous physical or mental exertion") to enter that rest ("cease work or movement," "relax," "allow to be inactive" or "stop your efforts"). What in the world? What does this mean? How can these two things happen at the same time? What a contrast. Hebrews 4:11 is in a section of scripture about Israel in the desert and its unbelief, fearfulness, disobedience and hardness of heart to enter the promised land. What is the effort? It has to do with trust. Looking back on the story, Israel's unwillingness to enter the land was because they were terrified of the inhabitants, "We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes..." Could it be at that moment they were faced with "make every effort," which was facing their fears and eventually how they were feeling, thinking about and experiencing God? I know for me, in my moments of being nudged to "enter," I usually am flailing (not resting) trying to figure out some way to survive what is in front of me. I forget to remember accurately who Jesus is. The effort, it seems to me, is about making every effort to see Jesus for who He really is... trustworthy, faithful, loving and simply good through and through and the strenuous effort needed against my own flesh... against my innate fleshly nature (not deeper than the new life inside of me) to regain trust. What an effort, "But the message they heard was of no value to them because those who heard did not combine it with faith..." (Heb. 4:2b).

The gift of being faced with a circumstance unsolvable, beyond us, or incredibly threatening, can then do one of two things to any of us, launch you or me into unbelief or into rest. Often times fear and unbelief win. The effort needed, the courage needed to remember Jesus and face my flesh, is often times beyond me and I settle for a lesser peace, "Let us go back to Egypt..." but sometimes I taste the "Sabbath rest" offered; I actually see the enemy, face my flesh and I glimpse and taste rest. Nothing circumstantially has changed, but I've changed. **I risk all of me and I enter the rest.** "I rest from my own work..." I believe. "Now we who have believed enter the rest..." (Heb. 4:3).

Cont...

Please consider going paperless. Email lanifayb@northlandccc.com to be added to the electronic newsletter list.

page 1 cont...

I think one of the wonderful things about getting older is that I see things a little clearer. I'm able to see my unbelief a little better. I see what kind of effort I must make to remember the nature of Jesus. I can see it a little clearer in people as well.

So to come full circle, what does the title of this newsletter mean, "The Breathless Pursuit of Receiving"? Jesus, the Lord and love of our lives is both the object of our pursuit and the giver of the "Sabbath rest". We don't want to, because of fear, cave to our "flesh" and allow it to dictate the direction of our existence. We must "make every effort" to face our own fears and believe. We eventually rest when Jesus becomes our "refuge and strength."

The battle really is occurring all the time in everyone. **One of the most important things we do at Northland Christian Counseling Center is to help people understand something of what a passage like Hebrews 4 means in everyday life.** So let us make every effort to enter the rest.

In Him,
Stephen Seay; Executive Director NCCC



"So let us make every effort to enter the rest". Wise words from our respected Director. And a wonderful reminder to me in the season I am in. It's a season filled with change and uncertainty - my wife finishing her doctoral degree after what seems like a lifetime of education; both of us accepting new jobs in a new community (Bemidji, MN); buying my first home in an intimidating seller's market alongside her; and dealing with unforeseen physical and mental health concerns. But I know that although the details vary, seasons of uncertainty are common for us all. We all know what it is like to not know what is around the proverbial corner... to not know what we

cannot yet see.

What do we do? Will it work out? Are we following God's plan? How do we prepare? These are questions I have asked dozens of times over recent months and questions like these are posed by the individuals I get to meet with every day. Answers and relief appear scant.

But maybe that's the point. Maybe the certainty of habitually finding ourselves in a state of uncertainty is intentional on God's part. What if our limited foresight, poor insight, scarce resources, and demanding impatience is met by our Heavenly Father to teach us something he intends for us to know deeply. Maybe the pain of disappointments and fatigue from consistent toiling in our everyday lives is allowed with His hope it draws us near to him. The warm invitation of Jesus found in Matthew 11:28-30 comes to mind. "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light".

The person of our Lord Jesus is the answer. And we can taste the sweetness of his responsive love again and again as most satisfying only after the bitterness life's discomforts and the anxiety of the unknown. His rest is available to us. Let us make every effort to enter his rest.

Drew Jaeger, NCCC

NCCC would like to thank Drew for his time here and wish him the best in his new adventure.

This year, donors gave over \$19,000 to NCCC for Giving Hearts Day!