**Part VI**

**Finding Your Daily Rhythm**

**Daniel 6; Exodus 20:8**

Canadian Poet Songwriter Leonard Cohen.

“The blizzard of the world

has crossed the threshold

and it has overturned

the order of the soul.”

**Parker Palmer** in his book “A Hidden Wholeness” tells a story of a time when farmers on the Great Plains, at the first sign of a blizzard, would run a rope from the back door out to the barn. They knew that the rope would be there to ensure they would return home safely.

They all knew stories of people who on their way back to the house, by mistake wandered off and been frozen to death, having lost sight of home in a whiteout while still in their own backyards.

**Parker Palmer** makes this connection. “Today we live in a blizzard of another sort. It swirls around us as economic injustice, ecological ruin, physical and spiritual violence, and their inevitable outcome, war. It swirls in us as fear and frenzy, greed and deceit, and indifference to the suffering of others. We all know stories of people who have wandered off into this madness and have been separated from their own souls, losing their own moral bearings and even their mortal lives; they make headlines because they take so many innocents down with them.”

I think the lost ones come from all walks of life. They could be school children, politicians, teachers, tradesman, clergy or CEO’s. No walk of life that is impervious.

**Some of us** fear that we, or those we love will become lost in the storm.

**Some are lost** at the moment and are trying to find their way home.

**Some are lost** without knowing it.

So what is our rope? If Christ is the safety of home; the light, the warmth, the safety – what would be our rope?

**Let’s pray and then roll the movie clip.**

**Movie: Daniel in the Lion’s Den**

Dialogue. What is the centerpiece in this story?

**Prayer.**

**Chapter 6:10** says, “Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to His upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. He prayed three times a day, just as he had always done, giving thanks to his God.”

I love the line they added in the movie. Daniel tells his friend Azariah, “I can’t live w/o praying to my God for a month!”

**Some context is important.**

Israel had lost their way spiritually. How were they to find their way back home?

They were guilty of worshipping foreign gods – temple prostitution, human sacrifice, alters to Baal in the high places, falic symbols or Asherah poles all over the place. There was nothing about the Hebrew people that set them apart from the other nations. God had to wake them up to their desperate need for Him. God had to somehow lead them back home.

To do so God allowed Israel to be taken into Exile to Babylon under the rule of King Nebuchadnezzar in the 3rd year of the reign of King Jehoiakim, around 600 BC.

Daniel and his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah (which means the Lord Helps) were among some of the young Jewish nobility carried off into exile in Babylon.

Daniel 1 says these boys were immediately chosen for their beauty and their intellect and were given new names, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and become trained advisors to the Babylonian court.

Vs. 17 says that God gave these four young men unusual aptitude for understanding every aspect of literature and wisdom.

The king found them 10X more capable than any other magicians and enchanters in Babylon.

Daniel ends up interpreting the king’s dream in chapter 2 and is catapulted into the highest position in the land.

Daniel is made ruler over the province of Babylon, as well as chief over his wise men.

And at Daniel’s request the king appoints Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in charge of all the affairs of Babylon.

What’s pretty unique about these boys is that amidst a culture that had lost their way, they remained true to their God and true to their convictions. They stood out amidst the crowd.

Even in Babylon, they didn’t become enveloped in Babylonian culture and pressures. They stood their ground in the face of incredible temptation to compromise. They didn’t lose their way.

**How?**

They knew their God as part of their experience. He was real to them.

And I wonder if it had anything to do with the fact would say it was that they continued to cultivate their intimacy with God through silence, solitude and prayer.

Scripture says that Daniel prayed 3X per day, as he had always done.

You would think that in this environment, even in their previous environment, apostate Israel, it would have been easy for these 4 men to allow their surrounding culture to overturn the order of their soul.

To get to the point where their hunger for truth, justice and forgiveness no longer guided their lives.

**But it didn’t happen.** Their hands remained secure on the rope. They didn’t lose their way.

We’re not in Babylon but we live in a culture with many of the same characteristics.

Like Babylon, we live in a culture where our way of faith and spirituality is not respected. For our kids in the public school system, they have learned to guard their hearts regarding faith.

Say you believe in God in school or in your workplace is tolerated; mention the name of Jesus and you are misunderstood, stereotyped, judged, and marginalized.

For some of our kids, the world out there feels like an exile. For some their families feel like exile; for some their marriages.

For Daniel and his 3 friends they couldn’t go to the temple to worship. Their temple didn’t exist. All that was normal was gone. To worship they went into their homes. This is where they met God. This is where worship happened. Where they prayed. All private. In secret.

Babylon was also a culture where every want and pleasure was endorsed and at your fingertips.

The architectural beauty all around them; the gardens, the produce, the food and wine, the sexual pleasures – all ready and available, there’s for the taking.

But they stood their ground and stayed true to the their values and convictions.

They believed that what God had for them was better than the riches of Babylon.

Scripture says that even when tall of Babylon’s fair and riches were before them they chose something better…what God had for them.

**Daniel’s life seemed different.**

**Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego seemed different.**

They seemed to have a centered life. Calm in the midst of the storm. A relaxed life that’s oriented around God. A deep connection to the living God.

Babylon is seen as a negative image in scripture. Babylon was always trying to imprint itself on Daniel and his friends. Cut Daniel off from his connection with God. Blur his hearing. Cloud his understanding of God. Dilute his experience of God.

He’s about 17-20 years old. His people have just been wiped out. Their temple has been destroyed. He could have been consumed with bitterness. But he wasn’t.

He finds himself in the University of Babylon, learning Babylonian ways of thinking, living, social norms, math, medicine, myths and spirituality. He’s learning astrology and all about their gods and ways of worship. They even change his name to Belteshazzer.

They want to make him totally Babylonian. Strip him of all that was Godly. Cut him off from his connection with God.

But God was calling Daniel to be different; to be separate, set apart; so they could be a blessing to the world around them.

Amazing to think that God positioned Daniel in the very court of King Nebeccunezzar to be a blessing.

The King would have these bizarre dreams and Daniel was there to interpret them.

**In that way, be a blessing**.

In the same way God places you right where you are; in the classroom, in the office, in the classroom, wherever God has called you – to be a blessing.

To help give people a different perspective on their lives. To show them a better way. To speak words of life. To be different. Set apart. Even to help interpret people’s dreams…their confusion…their life puzzles.

**We need to be connected to God in order for those things to happen. To be attentive to God’s voice, to be able to truly listen to others and what they’re saying and what they’re not saying.**

**Otherwise we miss those opportunities.**

I’ve been in those situations haven’t you? Where someone is sharing their life, their confusion, and you have the insight and the boldness to speak into their lives.

Help them hear Jesus and respond to His work in their lives.

I can’t imagine the pressure Daniel and his friends were under. The temptation all around them.

All of Babylon coming at them; it must have been intoxicating at times. Like everything was coming at them, trying to lure them away from who they knew Jehovah to be.

I think our teenagers are facing this same kind of pressure. It must feel like that at times; everything the world’s got is getting thrown at you, trying to lure you away.

The images on your devices. The texting, instagram – the social pressures, what you need to do in order to be liked, understood, respected, loved.

**This is why Daniel and his 3 friends give us so much hope. They stood their ground.**

**Interesting Daniel couldn’t do it alone.**

Last CWG we looked at Jesus in the Garden, inviting his 3 friends to grieve with him; Jesus wasn’t alone.

Nor was Daniel. He too had his 3 friends. He has support around him.

We all have our own Babylon, trying to pull us away from God. Trying to distant us from our Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

We all have a Babylon that is trying to steal our intimacy with Jesus. My Babylon is different than yours, but we all have a Babylon.

**Trying to steal our connection. Make us lose our way.**

We were all created for that deep connection; an experience of God.

He made us to experience His love. To be enveloped by His love.

**I took Beth, Anna and Luke to see the Watoto African** Children’s Choir this week. Many of you were there.

One of the most powerful aspects of that time was watching those kids worship. It got quiet, they sang Mat Mar’s song “I Need You” and just watching those kids. Eyes closed. Hands out. You could tell they were intimately connected to a God who has met them in their pain time and time again.

Many of them told stories of losing their parents to HIV Aids, being abandoned, never knowing their father, losing their loved ones to sickness.

Far from pain-free! So their worship wasn’t an escape from pain. It was inviting Jesus into it.

They led us in worship that night – because they were connected.

That is why Jesus came and died and rose from the dead. So you could be connected with a Holy Loving God.

**Interesting that Daniel prayed to God 3 X per day.**

**Daniel isn’t the only one who prayed multiple times per day.**

**David practiced set times of prayer 7 X a day as we see in Psalm 119.**

**The Jews in Jesus’ time pressed the pause button 2-3 X per day.**

Even after Jesus’ resurrection the book of Acts says that the disciples still prayed at certain hours of the day.

These are what the spiritual fathers called our **spiritual rhythm.**

**Mark Buchanan** suggests, “The idea of spiritual rhythm comes out of the seasons. Just like the world has seasons and distinct rhythms, so to we need spiritual rhythms to move through those seasons well.”

These daily times of pausing are really stopping to surrender to God and to trust.

**The theologian Robert Barron** puts it this way.

“After the full flowering of their achievements and activities, they were invited, not to be active, not to accomplish, but to surrender and to trust…striving, then letting go, doing all one can do and then being carried…only in this rhythm is the spirit realized.”

He even suggests that at the heart of original sin is this refusal to accept God’s rhythm for us.

God stopped from his work every day. And on the 7th day God rested. Therefore we imitate God by stopping our work and resting. If we can stop for one day a week, or mini Sabbaths throughout the day, we touch something deep within us as image bearers of God.

Our human brain, our bodies, our spirits, and our emotions become wired by God for the rhythm of work and rest in Him.

**I think for some people the only rhythm they know is go hard for 11 months a year, then crash for 4 weeks, trying to recoup to do it all over again.**

**We have a difficult time being still.**

Life without rhythms is like being on a treadmill. Always going fast.

Some identify. We want to stop the treadmill and get off.

**Scazzero** says that many of us have lost our way in the whiteout of busyness. When we say yes to too many things.

We have work demands, family demands, and our lives are no longer full but overflowing.

Many of us are overscheduled, tense, addicted to hurry, frantic, preoccupied, fatigued and starved for time. Way too much going on.

Many of us, if you’re like Kenda and I often, is that we end our days exhausted from work and raising kids.

Put our kids to bed, get lunches ready for the next day, finish up laundry and we are done. Crash on the couch, trying to reenergize ourselves with another re-run of Seinfeld.

But when we stop, we feel guilty that we hare wasting our time and not being productive.

Then amidst all this you get the storms of life that suddenly blow into our lives and we are caught off guard. We don’t have the strength to hold onto the rope. No wonder we become disoriented and confused and lose our way.

If you’ve ever tried stepping off a moving treadmill it’s dangerous. You just can’t jump off.

**It’s way better to stop the treadmill, and then step off.**

That’s what I think Daniel experienced. He knew the value of pausing throughout the day to remind his heart to trust. To surrender. To stop the treadmill to step off.

**Daniel 6 says “Three times per day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he’d done before.”**

Some translations say, “It was his custom”.

His spiritual habit or practice.

**What’s your spiritual practice?**

I was taught to have my Quiet Time with God. Have you heard that term before? Or Devotions. Have you heard those terms?

Have you had your Quit Time? People ask you that, and most of us feel guilty b/c we haven’t as much as we like.

For most their spiritual rhythm consists of a short devotional in the morning, quick prayer than we’re off.

**Q:** I wonder what goes on for you when you hear this text; Daniel prayed to God 3X per day.

Does it make you feel guilty? Because your prayer life is poor or non-existent?

Do you dismiss it, saying that you’ve tried praying and it didn’t amount too much anyways?

Maybe you’ve had this pounded down your throat from previous pastors and spiritual leaders – pray more, pray harder…and it will all be better.

Maybe you’ve struggled with a habit of some kind, and pleaded with God in prayer to take it away and He didn’t. So you’ve given up on prayer.

**But maybe we’re looking at this all wrong?**

**For most of us our Quiet Time feels like work.**

The focus is usually for us to get filled up for the day or interceding for the needs around us.

We get our bible out and read and try to learn; or we pull out our devotional and read our portion for the day; then we pray for all the needs around us…and when we’re done we’re exhausted. It’s felt like work. And we don’t feel any closer to God after than when we went in.

It’s not been so much being with God and resting in Him and His love than it’s been about getting something from God so we could get things done, so we can get on with real life.

No wonder we don’t get prayer.

In **Psalm 23** David prays “…that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek Him in His temple.”

**What’s your first calling? What are you created for?**

**Scripture would say it is to seek God.**

Regardless of your profession, whether you’re a pastor, whether you’re a teacher, whether you’re a doctor or lawyer or schoolgirl, mom at home…it doesn’t matter. We all have the same Calling – to seek God – to be with God – to dwell in His presence all day.

**I want to introduce a new term. It’s called Daily Office.**

The root of the daily Office is not so much turning to God to get something **but to be with Someone.**

**See the difference?**

The word “*Office” comes from the Latin* word “opus”, or work. For the early church the daily Office was always the work of God.

Nothing was to interfere with this priority.

It was a time for the worshipper to stop what they were doing in their day, to surrender to God in trust.

Remind ourselves that we are not in control…and that God is. A time in the day where we consciously let go. Give cares to God.

To as **Psalm 46:10 and 37:7** admonish us to “Be still and know that He is God.” “Be still and wait patiently for him.”

I relate to **Pete Scazzero’s** experience.

He says, “I don’t know about you but when I just have my Quiet Time in the morning, and then begin to go about my day, I can lose sight of God within a few hours. I can so easily forget that God is present and near and an active part of my every day activities.

By lunch I can be short with people.

By late afternoon God’s presence has disappeared from my consciousness. By the time dinner is over and I’m putting the kids to bed they are wondering, “What happened to Dad’s Christianity??” By 10:00 pm I’m asking myself the same question.”

**I so relate.**

I think our desire is to pay attention to God all through the day. We long to be carried by His presence like **Brother Lawrence wrote in Practicing the Presence of God.**

I think there’s good reason why Daniel prayed 3 X per day. Why Jesus followed a similar pattern.

Why for the first 300 years of the church many bishops and leaders spoke of teaching people the value of pausing mornings, midday and evenings.

Where they took time with God multiple times per day to surrender to God in trust.

**Without hanging onto that rope**, we are so easily overtaken by the blizzard of life; by the blizzard within our very hearts.

I think it’s important as we consider the rhythms of our lives.

**What does your spiritual rhythm look like?**

**It’s different for all of us. What works for you might not work for me? That’s the beauty of the daily Office. You discover what is a good fit for you. You go at your own pace.**

The Office is different for everyone of us. What this looks like should match your own personality. It needs to fit who God made you to be.

The fact is God can come to us in so many ways. It’s not just one way.

I know people whose midday office is going for a hike outside. While they walk the dog, they are purposely listening…being still.

**Wholy Fit** incorporates scripture with exercise. It’s about loving God with your whole person, spirit soul and body.

For some it has to be inside, in their favorite chair…with their coffee and their journal…for others it’s being in the sun, or in the rain…being quiet enjoying the beauty of nature as a gift of God.

**The key is pausing in your day to purposely surrender to God in trust.** Reading the scripture before they leave and then mulling it over while they walk…or ride…or run.

**The issue is not so much what you do, it’s whom you are with.**

It’s not so much what you do, or even how long it is, the point is to include scripture and silence.

I have just gone through **Pete Scazzero’s Daily Office**. So good. So attending to the whole person…asking honest emotional questions.

And I’m not as legalistic about this as I once was. I cut myself some slack.

**The early church fathers** would practice 4 offices each day. There’s morning, midday, there’s evening at around 7 pm and then right before you go to bed. That might work for you too. Remember, some of these offices might be simply 10 minutes of quiet.

This might be something to strive for. Maybe it’s something you are already doing and not even aware that you are. The idea is to start and end your day with God.

**The Daily Office** had simply two offices per day. I tried to practice two daily but often it would just be one. But it get’s easy and easier to pause, and add more per day over time.

You might even want to begin to practice one daily office per day with your spouse. Or devote one day with your spouse per week – every Thursday morning…or before you go to be you take turns articulating with each other before God what you’re grateful for that day and what you’re not grateful for. Great time of confession.

Now I am using something called **Sacred Space.** I have Blogged one of them so you can access too.

I love it because it provides some structure, but allows for so much freedom. And it allows for such emotional honesty. It pursues reality rather than escape from reality. Invites Jesus into all you are.

It is broken up into 6 sections.

* Presence – slowing down / short scripture
* Freedom – truth statement
* Consciousness – honest examine / search me O God
* Scripture Reading
* Conversation with Jesus
* Conclusion

**This can take 10 minutes or 45 minutes, all depending on how long you spend in each section.**

**To give you an idea, the Consciousness section on Wednesday looked like this.**

Knowing that God loves me unconditionally, I can afford to be honest about how I am.  How has the last day been, and how do I feel now? I share my feelings openly with the Lord.

The section immediately following the scripture text is entitled consciousness. And the questions go like this.

How has God's Word moved me? Has it left me cold? Has it consoled me or moved me to act in a new way?  I imagine Jesus standing or sitting beside me, I turn and share my feelings with him.

This is working for me right now, but we need to change it up often so it doesn’t become monotonous.

But it has to work for you. If it doesn’t work, find something that does. Whatever centers you on the grace and love of Christ for you.

**The greatest element in the Daily Office isn’t busyness, it’s silence.**

I think silence is one of the missing gems in the church today.

Where devices and phones are turned off. No music, no distractions – just being still.

**Soren Kierkegaard**, a theologian in the last Century wrote this in his journal before he died.

He said, “If I could only prescribe one remedy for the ills and problems of the modern world I would prescribe silence because without silence, if the Word of God is proclaimed, it can’t be heard. There is too much noise. So I prescribe silence.

It’s been said that the only thing that can contain God is silence.

Silence is all about quieting the inner and outer voice to attend to God.

**Henry Nouwen** said, “Without solitude it is almost impossible to live a spiritual life.”

Elijah heard God in a still small voice; silence. The same is true for us.

I think most of us struggle with the idea of silence. Studies show that the average group can only bear 15 seconds of silence.

Maybe you’ve tried practicing listening and silence and solitude before. Maybe you found it hard.

**Maybe your experience went something like this.**

You’re coming to God. You get quiet for 2-3 minutes to breath. Centre on God. Maybe read the text “Be still and know that I am God.”

Then you get quiet. First minute rolls by and then what?

The thoughts rush in.

O, did I back up my computer? When’s the last time I backed up? Sure great the Seahawks won the Superbowl. What a game. Poor ol’ Payton Manning. I wonder when the church tax receipt is coming? I can’t wait for my tax return. Mexico here we come. When’s the last time I’ve got my tetanus shot.

O yes. Focus. Be still. Silence. Okay. Okay. Am I doing this right? Doesn’t seem like anything is happening. I don’t think I’m getting anywhere. Is this for real? I don’t think I have the personality for this. Where is God in all of this? How much longer is this going to last? I better check may watch. You know a cup of coffee when this is over will be nice. I should have had a cup before I got started.

**And that’s just the surface distractions.** What about the distractions that seem to be darker? From our shadow side? Temptation? Lustful thoughts. Resentments? What then?

This is where I want to encourage you that these things are not new. We all struggle the same.

**Rather than fight all the thoughts, I want you to listen for God in the midst of them.**

Rather than simply push down a “bad” thought, try paying attention to it.

**It might look like this.**

**~ Maybe a hurtful memory** comes to the surface. Causes feelings of anger. Response would go something like this. “Lord, I confess that I am angry at so and so…Feelings of contempt keep coming up for me. Lord why is this? Ya, I haven’t forgiven them from my Heart. Lip service yes, but not from the heart. Lord, I forgive them for that thing they did…it hurt so badly. I felt so betrayed. So used. I confess I don’t have what it takes to love people well. Help me Jesus. My heart is hard. I need your grace. You forgive me? Yu love me even at my worst? God thank-you for your grace. I choose to forgive so and so. Ya, I’ve turned on a friend too. I too am in need of grace. Far too often. I choose to forgive as I have been forgiven.

**~ Or a lustful thought emerges** when you’re quiet. Rather than push it down see it as a gift. Lord, there’s that thought again. Why does this thought or image keep popping up? Ya, I have entertained that thought for far too long. Where does it come from? It comes from that time my dad asked me to clean out the garage and I found his stash of porn. I still remember the rush it gave me. I opened the door to something that day that I wished I wouldn’t have. Do I want to close that door? I don’t know. Can I trust you to meet these needs for love in healthy legitimate ways? Yes…but I’m scared. Do I believe you’re here with me? That it’s You that I’m actually thirsting for? Your love. You love me? Me? Your love is amazing Lord.

**You see** how not all the things that flood our minds in times of silence are distractions and meant to pushed aside. Some we can actually see as the very thing God is inviting us to look at. See these things as a gift.

For this reason silence can be difficult; but if pushed through can be such a gift.

**Scazzero** says that “Silence before God like this helps peel back the false layers of yourself and gets you to a place where you begin to know yourself. It gets to the true you. Not all the false layers and labels that can so often define us.

Practicing silence can also help us in decision-making; learning to slow down throughout the day teaches us to slow down before making decisions and not be so impulsive. It teaches us to be slow to speak and quick to listen.”

Silence helps us to enjoy God. Minimize stress and anxiety because we’re slowing down our breathing; taking time to surrender our cares and worries to Jesus throughout the day.

I don’t know what kind of blizzard you’re facing these days? The busyness. Always frantic and hurried. Stealing your joy.

Or the blizzard of distractions from people, technology, the need to succeed, the need to be fit, the need to have it all figured out, the need to please everyone.

Maybe you feel like you’ve lost your way in the storm.

**It’s not too late to find your way back to God.**

I think it comes back to placing your hands back on the rope. This has to do with spiritual rhythm in your day – you have to find rhythm or else you’ll be swept up.

You have the capacity to slow down to be with God. And be still before Him. Inside you is that passion. You were created to connect with God. To commune with Him. Rev 3:20 Jesus tells us that He is standing at the door of our hearts knocking, wanting to come in. You have this desire to connect, to know the Father’s love for you. But you’ve allowed that passion to be covered up in layers…but it’s there. It just needs to be awakened.

**We’re going to take 5 minutes of quiet and see how we do.** Here’s some instruction.

You might want to find a spot on the floor. Sit down. Get comfortable. Or you might want to sit up straight.

You might want to follow Marellie in some wholly fit exercises?

Whatever you do begin by breathing deeply. Conscious of your breath going in and out. Try to relax yourself…breath out your junk and breath in the breath of God.

**Psalm 130** says, “I wait for the Lord. My soul waits.”

Lord, I wait for you.

What are you waiting for? Waiting for your boyfriend, girlfriend, spouse, and pastor to change?

Waiting for a new job, a new home, your house to sell, a girlfriend, a boyfriend, and a child?

Your kids to change?

Maybe it’s time to shift your focus and turn your heart to God and acknowledge that you’re waiting for Him; and in so doing trust that God has all these other things covered.