

John D. Rockefeller is probably the richest persons who ever lived - at his richest, he was worth nearly \$360 *billion* in today's dollars. There's a famous story that circulates about Rockefeller - that he was asked once, How much money will be enough? He allegedly replied, Just a little bit more.

That's apparently not true - the quote is more reliably attributed to a man named John Paul Getty. He was a pauper compared to Rockefeller - he was only worth a measly 8 billion dollars. And apparently he was convinced that he would never have enough. That even wealth measured in the billions of dollars isn't enough.

No one knows when the quote first got attributed to Rockefeller, but do a casual Google search and you'll find it all over the place, attributed to him. Despite the fact that he never said it.

Why?

[Just a Little Bit More graphic] Because it *feels* true to us. We understand the addictive power of wealth, of having stuff. Whether the guy had 8 billion or 300 billion, it sounds like something a billionaire might say. In fact, we *all* experience, in much smaller ways, how it feels always to be chasing Just a Little Bit More. Which puts us face-to-face with a reality that troubles us more than we like to admit:

Hard work can be toxic.

That feels wrong to say. After all, that Protestant Work Ethic is woven deeply into the DNA of our country. The American Dream is built by hard work. And who would argue that hard work is a good thing? Who doesn't enjoy the feeling of relaxing at the end of a day where you've been crazy-productive, where everything was just firing on all cylinders.

We've all experienced those moments of holy exhaustion, when you did something that you knew contributed to the larger world in a wholesome way and it felt good and true and right.

But there's that poison too, that Just a Little Bit More mentality that we also plainly recognize as bad. The posture of the workaholic, the absentee parent who never sees their kids, always at work even when we're at home, unable to shut off and shut down.

Is hard work good? Or is it bad? Obviously the answer is Yes, but why? How? How can we know which is good and which is bad? When to lean in and put in a little bit more and when to set it down and walk away?

We find the answer in this series we begin today called American Gods. Today is the first Sunday of Lent, a season in the life of the Church that began on Wednesday night (with Ash Wednesday). Lent is a season we set aside to examine the particular ways we choose to ignore God's work in our lives, the sin that separates us from God and each other. Lent isn't a fun season, but it's important. If we don't take our sinfulness seriously, then we don't understand what it means to say that Jesus rescues us from that Sin. And that's what Lent is: a big arrow pointing us toward and preparing us for Easter Sunday, the celebration of Jesus' resurrection.

During the next six weeks, we will look at various institutions and activities in our American culture that easily become idols. When we hear the word "idol" we think of little statues worshiped in caves by tribal peoples. And while it's certainly true that - particularly in the ancient world - idols were often

represented by statues, that's because those statues actually represented other gods. Idols are essentially false gods. They make claims about the nature of reality and our place in it. In a book all of you should read called *Playing God*, by a tremendous guy named Andy Crouch, he defines an idol like this:

[An idol] advances a claim about the ultimate nature of reality that is ultimately mistaken. And since the Creator God is the ultimate meaning of the world, an idol is a representation of a false god. Implicitly or explicitly, all idols represent a challenge and counterclaim to the identity and character of the true Creator God. Like the serpent in the Garden, they all raise the question of the Creator God's truthfulness and goodness, subtly or directly suggesting that the Creator God is neither true nor good. -- Andy Crouch, *Playing God*

We want to know what the new gods of America are. What aspects of our culture get twisted, distorted, misplaced in our lives and cause us to doubt the truth and goodness of the God we know in the person of Jesus? [idols gravity well image]

An important observation about idols as we begin: Idols are not usually *bad* in and of themselves. That's what makes them so susceptible to becoming idols. Something good in our life becomes twisted or distorted. We give it more time, attention or value than it actually deserves. And *that's* when things get bad. Because we begin to listen to what the idol promises us instead of what God promises us.

A framework of idolatry helps us make sense of that tension we experience around work. How can work be both good and toxic? If work is one of those American Gods. A good thing - hard work, productivity - that becomes misplaced, overvalued in our lives.

So if work can become an idol, then - according to Andy, work must raise the question of God's truthfulness and goodness. Work must cause us to question God. How?

Work becomes a god when we believe the lie that what we need to be fulfilled, to be happy, to live the good life, is just a little bit more. [Bring back Just a Little Bit More graphic]

Just a little bit more money and we'll be able to afford the life we want.

Just a few more hours and I'll get that promotion, or finish that project.

Just a few more years and we'll be able to get that house or car or vacation home or whatever.

How much is enough? The god of Work says Just a little bit more.

That's the lie. The lie that you can't stop, can't afford to take a break. Because the God of Scripture has a very different answer. When the God of Work demands Just a Little Bit More, the God of Scripture says, Six Days is enough.

If you have your Bibles, turn with me to Deuteronomy 5. If you grabbed one of our bibles on the way in, you can find Deuteronomy 5 on page XXX [Scripture title slide]. And if you don't own a Bible, we'd love for you to take that one with you - consider it a gift from us. As you turn to Deuteronomy 5, let me give you a little background:

Deuteronomy 5 is the second time we get the 10 Commandments listed. It's a review of the whole instructions God gave the nation of Israel when they agreed to be his people. The 10 Commandments are considered the summary of the whole law. In other words, the 10 Commandments are a picture of what it looks like to live the way God created us to live. They're guidelines to what a whole, healthy humanity looks like.

This particular commandment - number 4 - is the Sabbath commandment. Let's take a look, beginning in verse 12:

Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the Lord your God has commanded you. You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the Lord your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your oxen and donkeys and other livestock, and any foreigners living among you. All your male and female servants must rest as you do.

One day out of every seven, we aren't supposed to work. To flourish as humans means we set aside one day of each week, 1/7 of our time, in which we rest. [stop sign vs. money tower]

Now, a lot of us read these words and associate Sabbath in our heads as a lazy day. We hear "don't work - rest instead" as a command to inactivity. As though the Sabbath is sitting in a dark house not doing anything.

It's easy to see why we'd think that, but that's not what Sabbath is. God is clearly not opposed to hard work - he commands us to spend the other six days doing our work. This fits with what we sense - hard work is good. It's valuable and praiseworthy.

BUT according to Deuteronomy, our lives shouldn't be consumed with constantly producing. We should take Sabbaths away from work. So what *is* a Sabbath, if it's not inactivity?

I've found it helpful to think in terms of productivity. "Work" is all the things we do to produce and contribute to our culture, our society, our family, and so on. It's the stuff we do to make and get more stuff.

Sabbath - taking a break from producing - is a divine waste of time. It's engaging in activities that aren't productive - on purpose. Sabbath is sacred play.

If that sounds a little silly, let's consider the last part of the Sabbath commandment in Deuteronomy: in verse 15, God gives Israel a specific reason they should keep a Sabbath every week:

Remember that you were once slaves in Egypt, but the Lord your God brought you out with his strong hand and powerful arm. That is why the Lord your God has commanded you to rest on the Sabbath day. -- Deuteronomy 5:12-15

Why should I keep a Sabbath? Because I was once a slave in Egypt, but God rescued me. That's why. Because I'm not a slave anymore.

Now, you might be saying, Uh... JR. I was never a slave in the first place. And in a sense you're right. But let's dig a little bit.

We know from the Exodus story that in slavery, Israel was forced to make bricks from mud and straw. Since they were slaves, their worth could be measured in bricks. Every day, their value as a person could be stacked next to them and evaluated.

A life measured in bricks. A human person reduced to a pile of mud and straw. [stack of bricks]

Now: you and I aren't slaves in Egypt, making bricks out of mud, but when we aren't careful, we allow ourselves to be similarly reduced. We measure our value in terms of what we can produce. We don't pile up bricks, but maybe it's zeros on a paycheck. Or square feet in a house. Or number of kids or how many sports they're in. [stacking bricks]

We begin to think that our worth as a person comes from what we can produce. And that's how a slave's worth is measured. This is what God freed us from - a life measured by bricks.

But we forget. We lose track. And we begin to pile up our accomplishments again. Measure ourselves, our worth, by how much we produce, believing that what will fulfill us, what will give us value is just one more brick. Just a little bit more.

So God said: you must remember that you were a slave, you were measured by the bricks you made. But not so anymore. My people will be free. Your value will come from the plain and simple fact that I created you and you bear my image. That's it. Your value will have nothing to do with what you produce.

[bring back stop sign] But you forget that. So once a week, take a break. Stop producing. Waste some time to remind yourself that your safety and security and prosperity don't come from how much you make. Just a little bit more isn't going to be enough.

That's a powerful vision of Sabbath: that the world doesn't depend on you to keep spinning. That no pile of bricks will ever be tall enough. Because there's no such thing as "enough" when it comes to making ourselves feel secure. That sense of safety and security can only come from God.

Which is why God says, Every week you need to stop producing and just be. Waste some time. Play with your family. Indulge in a hobby. Have some fun. Say to the God of Work, Not Today! Because you don't belong to the god of Work. You belong to the God who made you, loves you and called you to be part of his people.

Several places in the Scripture, God declares that the Sabbath day is *the* marker of his people. What makes you one of God's and not some other nation or god's is that you STOP. That you keep a Sabbath day.

That's staggering, given how easily we brush off a Sabbath day these days. There was a time in our country when nearly everything was closed on Sundays, so it was easy to observe a Sabbath - you didn't have a lot of other options. But today, we all know that's not the way it is. If you want to spend your Sunday working, you have email and a laptop.

You can spend all day at the sports field running from game to game (which, whatever we call them, so easily become less about fun than chasing a medal and jockeying for position on the better teams next year).

You can give your life over to all manner of things even on the weekends that are geared toward producing, toward earning, toward making.

Divinely wasting time together is a lot harder than it used to be. But it's no less vital. And it's no less a marker of God's people. [bring back side-by-side/overlay]

Too many of us have bowed low to the god of Work. We believe his myth of productivity, the lie that says Just a Little Bit More is going to get you where you want to be? That Just a Few More Weeks and *then* you'll be able to take a break?

How many of us are so busy building our lives that we never actually stop to live them? How many of us are missing the beauty God has given us *now* for the false promise of later? This is what Jesus warns us about in his Sermon on the Mount. He cautions:

Don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?' These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today. -- Matthew 6:31-34

How do we worship the god of Work? We sacrifice our time. We give him far too much of one of our most valuable commodities. All because we believe the lie that Just a Little Bit More will give us what we really want. That just a few more bricks will build a better life for us. But consider this:

Your kids will never be this old again.

Your marriage tomorrow will either be a little better or a little more bitter.

Tomorrow your parents will be another day older.

You will never have this day again. Are you going to give it to the god of Work or the God of Love?

What would it look like to waste a little time today?

That book isn't going to read itself. That craft isn't going to finish on its own. It's been too long since that table was full of food, friends and family.

[bring back overlay once more]

The stark reality is that Sabbath is difficult. The god of work has convinced many of us that we can't afford to stop making bricks. That if we just work a little bit harder right now, in this season, for this time, if we'll give just a little bit more right now, then he'll reward us later.

But there is no later. There is only now. And NOW, the Creator God, the one who made and knows and loves you says STOP. Once a week. Every week. STOP making bricks. Stop building your life and just live it. With him and with the people you love.

You can't afford not to take a break. So say to the god of Work, Not today. Listen to the God who created you. STOP building and start living.

**Brick Examine**

1. **What does "making bricks" look like in your life?** In other words, what do you produce? What makes you feel valuable?
2. **What would it look like to take a weekly break from brick-making?** In other words, what
3. **How will you Sabbath this week?**