

Permission to Lollygag

by

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"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." Mark 6:31 (ESV)

My wife and I had an interesting remembrance of the word, "lollygag" this past weekend. Yes it is a legitimate and defined word in dictionaries. It originated in England, and the Oxford Dictionaries define it as: *"to spend time aimlessly; idle."*

Honestly, I thought *lollygag* was an example of one of those many south Mississippi expressions I grew up with from my parents and grandparents, which is often not defined in an English dictionary. Even so, the word was well understood by a southern boy, who was caught *lollygagging* instead of doing his chores like his dad told him to do. I always heard it from my parents as well deserved criticism when I was lazy and irresponsible. But the problem came later when I didn't separate their necessary criticism in my childhood from the voice within me, and from the Accuser's voice outside of me. You see, like many of you reading this devotional, as a grown man I did not give myself permission to relax, even when my time permitted it. I felt guilty if and when I needed or wanted to *lollygag*. I think most of us struggle with this tendency, and without realizing it, we play into Satan's scheme to make us excessively busy, and we lose our tender heart in the process.

In my income producing days, I began to see any and all leisure as *lollygagging*, and I criticized myself as lazy, irresponsible, or asleep at the wheel. Even on vacations and times of rest, I had to have a project or challenge to make my time useful. From reading a heavy study book (it couldn't be entertaining) to writing a book, or fishing and golfing like a wild man, I had to fill my empty time with responsible duties, or activities. People have asked me why I have difficulty simply lying down and resting when they see I have need of it. I can't answer them. I think it is the way most men are made. I think it is because we are hunters, gatherers, providers by instinct, and this keeps us on guard, and our mind on the next responsibility. Do you connect with this? Even as an older man I can struggle with this bent if I don't stay aware of this tendency in my life, for the Accuser never sleeps. I could go on with many examples from my experiences, but I don't think I have to, for you guys are thinking of your own self-criticism and the voice that accuses you, aren't you? Maybe it comforts you that finally someone tells you he understands what is so perplexing in you, that thing you do not understand about yourself? Are you in agreement that this is our tendency as men? Is this true with you? If you have come to see this, and you are ready to do something about it, let's get a battle plan.

We must start with understanding how God's original plan was corrupted because of the fall by sin. Before the fall of mankind into sin, we had the ability to live in complete harmony with God's design for His creation. It came naturally. After the fall, our harmony with God and His nurturing plan for us was broken. This led to work becoming a sweaty challenge against weeds that was not realized before, and the pain in childbirth fell on women. Everything else got out of whack, including the way we see ourselves and the use of our time. Now keep in mind that our Creator gave mankind the Sabbath at our creation. It is a need that we have in our created design. It is good for us. But, His grand design for us was disrupted by sin and most often His good things given to protect us have been put on the back burner of our life.

God rested after His great work of creation, and He instructed us to do the same from our work each week. However after the fall, unless we are given some kind of authoritative mandate, or permission, or Divine decree, most of us guys will not simply lie down and empty our minds and hands of something we must do or plan, for we listen to the Father of Lies. But it is so obvious that we need to listen to God on this. I'm not a computer geek, but I know that when our computer is sluggish or not working right, rebooting the computer clears off the current state of the software and starts it over again. Basically we're dumping out the junk and starting over again fresh. In the same way, the Sabbath and *lollygagging* rest works for us. But our fallen nature will not give ourselves permission to truly *reboot*, or let go and rest, even though we can read in scripture that our Creator instructed us to do so. We do not understand this, even though we see that the Good Shepherd made His sheep lie down in green pastures to restore. We need to get this, for it is important: Lying down, resting, *lollygagging* is essential to restoration, and restoration is essential for all forms of good health, whether it is physical, mental, or spiritual health. Do you think God knows something about our needs in these areas guys? He tells us to do these things for a reason.

God, the Creator of man and beast saw it as an essential part of His creation to make sure that we understand the need for rest. Therefore He gave us the Sabbath to use for this necessary need. Jesus also made it clear in Mark 2:27 how we are to look at the Sabbath from a correct theological point of view. He said, "*The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.*" From a practical point of view, and I know you practical thinkers are challenging me on my emphasis, you need to read the scripture referenced in the heading of the devotional again. You will see that Jesus took His men out of a busy, fruitful, demanding ministry time they were in, and made them rest. He gave them permission to *lollygag*. He led them beside still waters. It was important for them, and for Himself.

The reason I used this old word to describe a current need is because my wife was explaining to our daughter that things have been so demanding on her for the last several months that we had to get away to just *lollygag*. My daughter didn't know the word and when my wife laughingly explained it, our daughter said that it was a perfect description of what Sallie needed. As I heard this conversation, and reflected on my own needs and tendencies, I came to understand that like many other devotionals that I have written, God was leading me to write this exhortation to some of you guys out there who need permission to rest. I feel He is leading me to tell you that if you do not rest from your worries, responsibilities, and the tension you are under, you will become a casualty of the Accuser's scheme to burn you out and discourage you. Many bad decisions have been made in this vulnerable time. You can make financial mistakes to moral mistakes, because you need to be refreshed, and see things differently. Many consequences could have been avoided if a "reboot" was hit in my life at critical times, and I hope you can avoid them in yours by taking my advice.

Some of you are saying, "That's good for him to say but he doesn't know my life and demands." I probably do know what you are going through, for if you haven't noticed lately, I'm pretty vulnerable with my own struggles and past mistakes. I've been in a lot of real life situations and I generally speak from experience when I share. So I've probably faced what you are facing now. Even if I have not, I am emphatic that all our answers are found in an intimate, abiding relationship with Christ, no matter how unique our particular challenges are. I point eyes and hearts toward Christ, for I am absolutely convinced from my own failures and from my King's interventions in my life that His hand reaches out to you as well. It is not my wisdom and my help I extend. I am only a man. I extend Jesus and His help. So, I extend to you in an invitation to give yourself permission to get away from your burdens, and *lollygag* with Jesus for a while. Take the time. Refresh. Rest. It will be good for your soul. Never allow the Accuser to make you feel guilty about doing something that your Creator has told you that you need. You have His permission to *lollygag*. Now do so without guilt.