

## In Sync

Dr. Stephen D. McConnell



*Exodus 40:34-38*

Christiaan Huygens, the famous 17th century Dutch scientist, is known for his discovery and invention of many things with which you and I today are quite familiar. Huygens discovered the polar caps on Mars, the rings around Saturn and the equatorial bulge on Jupiter. He developed the wave theory of light and established the idea of centrifugal force. He also invented the pendulum clock, the kind of clock with a pendulum that hangs below that swings back and forth, one form of which we know as the grandfather clock. One day Huygens had a couple of these pendulum clocks in his laboratory, and as he was preparing to leave he set the pendulums swinging but they were not in sync with each other. He left. A day or so later he returned and noticed that now the pendulums were in sync. They were swinging with each other. He decided then to experiment and set up another clock. Now he set the three clocks out of sync with each other. A day or so later they were in sync. Four clocks the same thing. Five clocks the same thing. He filled the whole room with these pendulum clocks and sure enough all of them were remarkably able to sync with one another. Now this phenomenon, this synchronization of two or more rhythmic cycles that Huygens discovered, came later to be called the Entrainment Transformation Principle – two or more oscillating bodies locking into phase creating a harmonic vibration. It is a universal principle that takes place in chemistry, psychology, sociology, astronomy, architecture, you name it. Even women’s menstrual cycles. In a nutshell what it means is: rhythmic bodies adjust to the rhythms around them. As one pendulum swings, others will come to swing along with it.

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Now this theory of physics, this entrainment principle which I am sure is a whole lot more complicated than how I described it, certainly helps me to make much more sense out of the rhythm of our lives. If there is anything I hear talk about in my comings and goings it

has to do with the rhythm of our lives or the pace of our lives. And the common concern that gets raised is it’s too fast. This is not a concern specific to our generation or century. People have been complaining about life getting too fast for a long, long time. But life gets faster and faster and we seem to like the pace less and less.

Truth is, though, we are rhythmic bodies adjusting to the rhythms around us. When the computer hit the horizon, and then the internet, and then the cell phone, the rhythm of the world got faster and so we, in turn, got faster. And that’s why we complain about having so many time “saving” devices we don’t seem to have any more time. Well, of course, there is no such thing as a time saving device; there are only time using devices. My computer does not save me time, it requires my time, especially when I walk into the office in the morning and face however many emails from the day before. The rhythm of my life adjusts to the greater rhythm around me.

No time do I experience this more than when I am in the midst of a fairly significant intense conversation with someone; perhaps one of us is pouring out a little bit of their heart. And then one of our cell phones goes off or a text dings in. And so it gets answered and a conversation ensues and then concludes. And then it’s “Where were we?” Well, of course, whatever intensity we had has been lost – the intimacy of the conversation flutters away. And the rhythm that we were experiencing has been enveloped by the rhythm of the greater thing around us.

And strangely one of the outcomes of all this is that we’re left with no rhythm at all. It’s not that our rhythm is too fast, it’s that we have no rhythm at all. 34 of us just flew back from our pilgrimage to Scotland and Narnia where we put our bodies through two cross-Atlantic flights and about 25 different bus excursions and at the end of it all our bodies said to us – you ain’t go to no rhythm. Life was not meant to be lived across five time zones!! The ancients didn’t go more than a hundred miles from their homes and they certainly didn’t have cell phones to interrupt their conversation or their gazing into the heavens – it would have been unthinkable to misalign yourself from the rising of the sun to its setting.

We ain’t got no rhythm, but that doesn’t mean we aren’t rhythmic creatures. We are desperate to be aligned to the greater rhythms of God’s created order.

Two weeks ago our Scottish pilgrims took a quick trip over to the Island of Iona where the Celtic Christian St. Columba set up his little community in the sixth century and by it brought Christianity to Scotland. And what did he set up? A community of Christian brothers who lived a daily discipline of pause, a daily rhythm of pause, of community together – farming, praying, scribing all for the glory of God and stopping at intervals of each day to pray – and people from all over came to Iona because they were desperate to be included in the same rhythm. And the irony was not lost on me that we toured this little island in a hurry, because we had to get back to the ferry.

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Now with all this in mind, might we find these last few words we read in the good book of Exodus quite striking. The story takes place in the midst of Moses and the people of Israel wandering in the dessert. They have encountered God in all sorts of ways: the burning bush, the plagues, the Passover, the parting of the Red Sea, the quail, the manna, the Ten Commandments from Mt. Sinai. It has been quite a journey. And all along God is revealing God’s power, revealing his love, revealing his will for the people. And if you put it all together what you would say is that God is revealing his glory. He is revealing the glory of his presence. His presence in the life of his people. And the story of Exodus is the accounting of the glorious presence of God.

And so as the Exodus story comes to a close the Exodus writer concludes by telling us that now that the people have been faithful to God and built the tabernacle, this transportable sanctuary where they are to worship God and make sacrifice we are told that as they journeyed with this tabernacle, from time to time the cloud and fire of God would descend upon the tabernacle and his glory would be revealed. God’s glorious presence. And this glorious presence of God is given very little description except to say that it came in cloud and fire. God’s glorious presence. Now, I’m not sure how many of us could say that we’ve experienced such a dramatic encounter with God, but I would be willing to bet that most of us could say that at some point in our lives we have experienced the glorious presence of God. It may not have to come to us in cloud and fire, but we have had those moments when we felt God and his glory really, really close. Some would say it was in a worship service. Some would say it was in their prayer time. Some would say that it was in nature. Some would say it was in their small group. Some would say it was in the birth of their child. Some would say it was when they ministered to the poor. There are all sorts of ways by which God chooses to reveal his presence and power. Seldom though does anyone say that they have experienced God in a rush. Seldom does anyone say that they have experienced God when they were in a hurry!

And I wonder if that doesn’t explain the response of the people of Israel when we are told that when the glorious presence of God descended upon the tabernacle, the

**“You see, when you find yourself in the midst of God’s glory, when God breaks in on your life and the cloud and fire descend in some form or another, you sense that there really is so much more to this life than what meets the eye.”**

people of God stopped! “Whenever the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, the Israelites would set out on each stage of their journey; but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out until the day that it was taken up.” In other words, they stopped their journey and they took in the glory. They did not, in fact, resume their journey until the cloud and fire lifted. They dwelled in the moment of God’s glory.

Now a lot of things can happen, I suppose, when you dwell in the presence of God, when you choose not to pick up stakes too early, but I wonder if one of the things that happens when you choose to dwell, not rush through but dwell in the presence of God, is that your rhythm becomes more like God’s rhythm. Your pendulum begins to swing with his pendulum.

You see, when you find yourself in the midst of God’s glory, when God breaks in on your life and the cloud and fire descend in some form or another, you sense that there really is so much more to this life than what meets the eye. And you begin to learn that the kingdom of God really is at hand. It is as close as the nose on your face. And you begin to realize that all that time you’ve wanted to save, it is for times like these that you have wanted to save it.

A while ago I was at a Panera having lunch and a dad came in with his daughter. They sat down at a booth. Now those are the times that we save for, right? Time with our kids. This is glory, right? So I observed from a distance with great expectation. But then came that tragic moment when dad reached to his side belt and clutched his cell phone and for a second I hoped beyond hope that he was reaching to turn it off. But no...he dialed. And I watched as he made 4 or 5 calls to whomever. And there sitting directly across from him was his twelve-year-old daughter -- this precious gift from God. Maybe the very channel of God’s glory and she was on her phone too! But the rhythm of what could have happened between father and daughter got enveloped in the greater rhythm of the world. Oh what might have happened if dad had chosen just to dwell in that moment. Just to dwell in that moment.

Did you ever realize how often the word dwell shows up in the Bible?

“One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.”

“Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise.”

“He who dwelleth in the shelter of the most High, who dwells in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord, ‘My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.’”

“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth.”

You see when God came to us in Jesus Christ, he came to dwell with us and he came for us to dwell with him. It does not say that the Word became flesh and caught us on the fly, the Word became flesh and talked with us a little while until we got a call on our cell phone, or the Word became flesh and tried his best to accommodate his rhythm to our rhythm. No, it says the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. He stopped and stepped into our lives and stayed a while. The devil tempted him to get it over quick -- turn the stones to bread, feed them and make it quick. But Jesus chose to dwell. To walk with us and talk with us. Did you ever realize how often Jesus chose to stop? He was stopping all the time. He would stop to talk, stop to heal, stop to teach, stop to pray, stop to feed. But he stopped. It is a part of dwelling. To reveal his glory by dwelling with us.

Have you left yourself room to stop? If the resurrected Jesus should appear in the course of your day – would it be in your rhythm to stop? Or maybe a better way to ask it is: are you stopping enough in the rhythm of your day to see the resurrected Jesus appear?

One of the more significant moments of our two weeks away for me occurred in the place I least expected it to. London’s Heathrow airport. We arrived there four hours before our flight so we had lots of time to walk and sit among thousands waiting for their planes – when all of a sudden the man on the loudspeaker said that in a moment we were going to observe a 60 second moment of silence for the victims of the Grenfell terrible tower fire where 79 at last count had perished, that had taken place earlier in the week. And that is exactly what we did. We stopped. The entire airport stopped and paused silently to put ourselves into the lives of the hundreds of people who had either died, or were hurt, or were

burned or were grieving. The entire airport stopped. No coffee service. No plane boarding. No bag checking. We just dwelled in the silence of our human connection. We afforded ourselves if only for a moment a different rhythm.

No surprise, of course, that the pages of Exodus command us to take Sabbath. No surprise that Jesus invites us to table. These are the stops and the rests in the rhythm of our song that make its harmony. These are invitations to dwell. To set a spell. To talk. To read. To pray. To merge our rhythms into God’s holy rhythm. To set our pendulums alongside the divine pendulum.

For the truth is, my friends, the presence of God is in the present. The resurrected Jesus is really resurrected. It means he is alive, it means he is real, it means that he is dwelling among us full of grace and truth. And what glory...what glory...if we would just pause.



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Church of the Palms

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