

## SERMON Waiting for God: Resting in God's Counsel by Dan Cravy

-I'm not sure when it was. Maybe around Christmas. A book showed up in my box. It was still in shrink wrap. No note. I assumed it was an anonymous gift. The book is a novel by Rob Bell who used to be a pastor of a large church called Mars Hill out in the Chicago area.

In any case, I picked it up a couple weeks ago. Turns out it's about a motivational speaker named Yves (pronounced Vee). Yves is a guy who travels from town to town delivering messages to big crowds in hotel conference centers. His talks are meant to motivate people's get up and go. To give them a sense that they can do it. One of Yves' series is called Bootstraps. It's about quitting your whining, getting to work, harnessing your drive, putting in the long hours, and becoming a success. You know, pulling yourself up by your own Bootstraps.

It's also about waking up in a new city every day, living out of a hotel room, meeting with the tour's logistics staff, sitting for hours signing books for people who think they know him, and striving in every way to make a killing on merchandise sales. Yves embodies the tireless drive and material success that he keeps motivating crowds of people to chase after. Then he crashes at home for a night or two, waves at his wife and daughter, walks around in a distracted daze. He's not really present at home – just dreaming up his next talks, reading his fan mail, and planning future events, before catching an airplane to the next location.

Yves is a man on the move. A guy taking the world by storm. A titan who encourages others to see anything less as weak. Yves doesn't Stop. He's tireless.

Until the day he gets tired. Until the tired he feels isn't about needing to go back to his hotel room for a nap. Or to go on vacation for a week. The tired he feels scares him. It leaves him unable to sign books for another thundering crowd. Unable to get on another plane. It leaves him trapped in this persona, ashamed to admit to himself that he can't just pull himself up by his boot straps./

Now it's a really intriguing thing to read a book when you don't know who gave it to you. Especially if you're a pastor reading a book about a motivational speaker suffering an important breakdown.

Because you have to wonder. What is the person who gave this to me suggesting? What does she know about me? What does he think I need? Or in which of these penetrating passages did they think of me and say: Oh, *Dan* needs to read this book. (That is, if they even read it before sending it to me.)

What would you think if someone mysteriously gave you this story to read?//

-I want to invite you to entertain the same question as I read the Scripture for today. What if Someone mysteriously gave you this story from Scripture to read today? (As we read, pay attention to the workload and pacing of *this* motivational speaker and notice just whom it is that pulls up his bootstraps):

This is from the Gospel of Mark, chapter 1, selected verses 21-39.

<sup>21</sup> They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, Jesus entered the synagogue and taught. <sup>22</sup> They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. <sup>23</sup> Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, <sup>24</sup> and he cried out, ...<sup>25</sup> But Jesus rebuked him... <sup>26</sup> And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. <sup>27</sup> They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." <sup>28</sup> At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

<sup>29</sup> As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon... <sup>30</sup> Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. <sup>31</sup> Jesus came, and took her by the hand, and lifted her up. Then the fever left her...

<sup>32</sup> That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. <sup>33</sup> And the whole city was gathered around the door. <sup>34</sup> And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons...

(now listen especially here)

<sup>35</sup> In the morning, while it was still very dark, Jesus got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. <sup>36</sup> And Simon and his companions hunted for him. <sup>37</sup> When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you. Everyone is searching for you!"

<sup>38</sup> He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." <sup>39</sup> And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God!

[pray]

-It's a long day. Jesus prepares what he wants to say. He teaches in the meeting hall. He casts out an unclean spirit, restoring a man's sanity. In the afternoon, he goes to Simon Peter's house where they ask him to heal Peter's mother in law. At sunset there's still more to do. People have heard of him and come running. Jesus begins attending to those who are sick or in search of wholeness. One by one.

It's like what you might have seen in poor countries when a physician comes to town. The whole city gathers at Jesus' door waiting to see him late into the night. Careful listening, true attentiveness, is exhausting work.

But early in the morning Jesus slips away. He climbs up to a deserted place overlooking the Sea of Galilee where he can pray.

Jesus knows when to stop. To get away to a deserted place. To go to the Source. To be reminded who God is. And who he is. And what he's supposed to do. Jesus turns to his Father to pull him up by the bootstraps.

And here's what I love about this passage. When Jesus goes away to pray, his companions actually hunt him down. They say: 'Everyone is looking for you! There's this enormous line. Lots more work to be done. And you're the only one who can do it. The whole city's chanting your name.'

And Jesus looks into their eyes with this deep assurance of peace and says: 'Let's go somewhere else.'

What! Jesus doesn't meet every need in front of him? Jesus doesn't come running to every call? No. In his practice of Stopping - in his practice of prayer - Jesus leaves tasks undone and needs unmet to return to the one who calls him Beloved before he could accomplish anything. It's there that he's reminded his worth doesn't come from his work.

And by resting in God's counsel, he finds the assurance to say No to even the good things people want him to do so he can say Yes to what God would have him do. To Stop, rest in God's grace, is to discover what to do and what not to do. Without anxiety, guilt or shame.

Now say *this* story were mysteriously given to you. What would it cause you to wonder??

-Yves goes away to the desert, too. He takes what he's experiencing as the disaster of his exhaustion to this place called Hesed House. Hesed House is a kind of retreat-recovery center. It's a gracious space for persons in some crisis. One of Yve's counselors there gives him an unexpected book to read. It's called Sabbath, by Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. That word Sabbath is filled with entire springtime of new possibilities. As you know, Sabbath, Shabbat, is the Hebrew word for Stop.

-Now I'm reading this book that came to me as what? a gift? a gentle critique? an invitation? And there are these mistakes through the whole book. Typos and formatting errors. Like, no one publishes a book that has this many blunders. And they kind of drive me crazy. I want to go back in time and edit for Rob Bell. I want to fix this book.

Dan Cravy is a reformer. I like to improve things. I like to make things better. Which is part of the reason work is never done. Something can always be improved. Something can always be made better. My ministry. My garage. My parenting. My community. My poor family! So I'm constantly trying to pull myself up by the bootstraps. Constantly trying to give myself a talking to. To get myself in gear. There's always more need. More to work on. More to do.

So, as I read this book I keep finding these perplexing mistakes. And I begin to think: Maybe this is part of the strategy. Did Rob Bell do this on purpose? Did he publish a book full of errors just to get to me? Did he write this

story about a guy on overdrive and leave the errors just to put us reformers on edge? Is he trying to get me to confront the part of me that can't stop? Is he trying to get me personally to sink down into the word Sabbath? To become thirsty meet with God in my desert and be reminded that my worth doesn't come from my work?

-In his desert, Yves has an unexpected brush with the spiritual power of Sabbath. His daughter comes to visit, and he feels badly he has nothing he can *do* for her. Nothing he can *buy* for her. No way to *impress* her. No accomplishment to make him *admirable*. They just lie in the grass and look up at the funny shapes of clouds till they fall asleep. It is all his daughter ever hoped for. She doesn't want what Yve can accomplish. Like God, she just wants *him*.

And that little truth is what sets us free to be.

-Friends, today a mysterious story or two have been given to you.

What if your worth doesn't come from your work?

Do you hear the permission to Stop?

Do you hear the invitation to return to the Source?

Do you wonder what you might hear if you were to practice resting in God's counsel?

-This weekend, my family will be renting a Yurt out near Saint Regis. We're going to practice the spiritual practice of Stop. We're going away to rest, to hike, to fish, to pray - maybe even to do nothing but look for funny shapes in the clouds.

We're headed out to this deserted place to let go of our bootstraps and take a deep drink of God's life-giving Spirit, even though, and Especially though, there will always be more work to be done. Amen.