

Sabbath and Sacred Listening

by Kris Camealy

The scarlet cardinal sings somewhere above my head. I look for him in the neighbor's tree, the one to my right, with the low branches that kiss the picket tops of our privacy fence. Staring through the sprawling brown mesh of shaggy bark, I hope for a glimpse of him. He lets loose another shrill excerpt from his evening song; I shield my brow and look again without success.

Closing my eyes, I give up and allow myself to simply listen. I don't, after all, *need* to see him to enjoy his presence. I notice other sounds—the wind whips, and the thick rustle of newly birthed leaves hush the noise that rumbles inside of me, the thoughts that rattle at the bars of my limited understanding, the internal noise that always threatens true rest.

The sun is slipping down to my left, just barely above the treetops now, and that mysterious cardinal calls out above the increasing whooshing of the wind, billowing its way through the branches of our lone maple.

I hear but do not see.

The wind lifts my hair and takes my breath away with its pushing, but I only feel the wall of it pressing in.

I can't see it either.

The sheer volume of the unseen stills me in my suburban backyard. I notice all of it, for maybe the first time in months. It all feels outrageously extraordinary—one beautiful symphony played by the glory of creation. Tears gather in the corners of my eyes without warning or explanation. The sudden awareness of how tiny I truly am bends me low.

I stand barefoot in this sanctuary.

That illusive cardinal trills on, his high-pitched tune cascading down from the rafters of heaven. These natural sounds, so different from the kind that usually clog my creativity and stall my art. This melody invites a quiet contemplation and a reverent embrace of stillness.

In these moments, God raises His gentle finger to my lips and hushes me with the intent of inviting me to really hear. My Sabbath bleeds over from Sunday, into Monday and right on through the week. It passes over into the week after, and the one after that, and the quieter I allow myself to become, the more I suddenly hear.

It's more than the stealthy cardinal, or the bullying wind that grab my attention. I hear the lullabies of restoration and healing coming. I find rest at the art table set up in my room, with glue between my fingers and traces of glitter on the cheeks of my girls. My own soul is learning to listen, to transcribe what it hears not in words but through images, and swaths of color. Art comes by way of listening, which comes by way of being hushed and stilled—all of which come by way of embracing a Sabbath.

I create a picture, a single child holding a crimson balloon, reminiscent of the cardinal. Cotton candy clouds flank the sky above her and a poem scrapped from a children's book invites me to *put my heart to the ground and listen until I understand*.

This is Sabbath unfolding.

My heart presses hushed against the Father's. And I listen, in hopes of understanding. I come with my own agenda, my own list of questions and an eagerness to know what I don't know. But as I learn to embrace Sabbath, I'm reminded that it is a gift—*rest*, a glorious gift too often unopened out of fear, or misplaced expectations.

Come to me, He calls, and I will give you rest.

Prayer:

Heavenly Lord, who calls and seeks us out,

We yearn to hear you and respond. Help us to take the time to listen and hear the beautiful symphony of your creation. Hush our busy lives which lead us to ignore your call to rest. Thank you for giving the glorious gift of Sabbath. We ask for the strength to open and embrace this gift of rest.

In Jesus' name, we lift our prayers to you. Amen.

Questions:

1. When was the last time you had a meaningful experience of rest and appreciation for God's creation?
2. Resting can remind us of how little we are. Do you find these moments of perspective scary or reassuring?
3. We are often too busy to express our creativity. What is your favorite way to be creative, and how can you incorporate it into your Sabbath practices?