Caleb Colby

* Caleb, a freshman at Stanford, was born in Santa Cruz but hails from Vancouver, Canada. He’s been enjoying the Vineyard community since October, and is looking forward to getting more involved with the youth ministry.

Struggling with Sabbath

Unfortunately, today is Sabbath. I really can’t afford to rest. Instead of starting my paper last night, I played Super Smash Brothers and watched YouTube videos. There are several people in my dorm whom I’ve been meaning to talk to about God, and I know that if I really want to rest, then I can’t be anxious to evangelize today. Here at Stanford, time is a precious commodity, and there is so much I want to do today!

But on Sabbath, I have to do nothing.

So after church, and after lunch with my friend Ricky, I unlock my bike and start pedaling for Lake Lagunita, my Sabbath space, to do nothing.

The funny thing about Lake Lagunita is that it isn’t a lake. Not anymore, anyway. Up until 2001, it was pumped full of water and used for sailing and windsurfing. But because of the water crisis, Lake Lag has been dry for over a decade. In fact, Lake Lagunita is an incredibly thirsty-looking place. Besides a few patches of withering grey reeds, the lake is one big bowl of dead, yellow grass. Still, it provides space to detach from the zooming road bikes, from the tall glass buildings, from the hustle and bustle of Stanford. It’s a space where I can be bare before God.

The fact is, I’ve been feeling quite thirsty myself. I feel burdened by how much my friends need God. Autumn quarter was full of fun get-to-know-you games, but by this time in the year, the truth about peoples’ lives is bubbling up, and in many cases, that means conversations about abuse, depression, and tragedy. I want them to find hope, I want them to find joy, I want them to discover Christ, and I fear that it’s up to me to make it happen.

I arrive at the dry lake and am surprised to find it verdant from the recent rains. The grass I thought dead is not yellow, but green; some of the reeds have turned a thistly purple. I sit beneath a tree and hear birds in the branches above me. I open to Isaiah 55 and read:

“The rains and snow come down from the heavens and stay on the ground to water the earth.

They cause the grain to grow, producing seed for the farmer and bread for the hungry.

It is the same with my word. I send it out, and it always produces fruit.

It will accomplish all I want it to, and it will prosper everywhere I send it.”

“Jesus,” I pray, “It’s your words that bring life, not mine. My friends here need you so much – and right now, I feel like I have so little of you to offer! But if this passage is true,” I point to verse 10, “then that doesn’t matter. Then there’s no reason for me to worry.” I sigh. “If this is true, then all that is required of me is that I wait and see, and you will come like the rain – unexpected, and full of promise.”

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I spend the rest of that day resting – playing ping-pong, writing in my journal, and watching a basketball game with Ricky. And it costs me: my essay could have used a little more polishing, and I do not really have any deep conversations about God with anyone. In my own understanding of economy, I am responsible for the outcomes in my life. Resting would detract from God’s kingdom—not to mention my grades.

But to take a Sabbath means to submit to God’s economy. Because in God’s economy, as Alex Van Riesen put it one Sunday, “it is God, and not us, who determines the good outcome of our lives.” How can I test that, how can I let God reveal Himself and accomplish His work, unless I stop and rest? To trust only myself – which, I admit, is what I often choose to do – amounts to practical atheism.

So today, I rest. And though I rest, God works.

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Later that night, as I am getting ready for bed, I hear a knock on my doorframe. It is Brenda, a girl from the floor below.

“Hey Caleb!” she says. “I just wanted to let you know that Mikayla and I got to talk more about God over lunch today.”

“Cool!” I say. “How was it?” Mikayla, Brenda and I have been chatting about how much we need God. Brenda and I grew up in Christian homes, and Mikayla became curious about God when her Grandma died a few years ago. We all see college as a time to explore for ourselves who God is.

“It was really good. Do you want to get breakfast sometime this week to talk more?” We agree on Friday.

I close the door and stand still. “I send out my word, and it always produces fruit.”  I hadn’t talked to Mikayla or Brenda for at least a week. And yet, God had spoken to them – and they wanted more. “Seed for the farmer, and bread for the hungry.” I knew that God was speaking to me, too. “You’re right, God,” I pray. “I didn’t need to worry.”

I climb into my bed and chuckle. I hadn’t accomplished anything that day. But fortunately, on my Sabbath, God accomplished a lot.