

Practicing the Way: Sabbath

Week 3: Rest

- Begin in Prayer (5 Minutes)
- Read: *Matthew 11:28-30; Exodus 20:2; Deuteronomy 5:6; Galatians 5:1; Hebrews 4:9-11*
- Leader Overview:

Note: Messages can be (re)watched shortly after Sunday gatherings on our YouTube [Page](#)

Have you ever tried to give someone what you thought was good advice, only to have it fall flat or blow up in your face? When you are around someone who is stressed, the last thing they usually want to hear (but the first thing we normally say...) is "Hey, you just need to calm down." Maybe you are talking to someone who is worried or anxious. It's very easy to tell them to "stop worrying because it will all work out." It may sound good to the speaker, but it usually doesn't sound good to the hearer. With that in mind, as we cross the halfway point in our series on the practice of Sabbath, now seems as good a time as any to acknowledge something: It's easy to talk about Sabbath, but it's very hard to practice in real life. It's one thing for pastors to stand up on a stage for five weeks and say that God has given us this great gift of Sabbath and all you have to do to receive that gift is to set aside 24 hours every week to stop, rest, delight, and worship. It's easy to look at people who are tired, exhausted, burned out from working hard, raising a family, running errands, trying to stay in shape, trying to keep the house clean, or just trying to simply make it all happen every single week and say, "You just need to get some rest." Great, we think, I'll just tell my boss, my kids, my teachers, my parents, my HOA, my spouse, or whoever else is expecting things from me each and every day that I'm just a little tired.

The irony, of course, is that rest is precisely the thing that many of us need most. 'Busy' and 'tired' are the primary ways most of us answer questions like 'How are you doing?' or 'how was your week?' Busy and tired should be like the check engine light and the low fuel light of our lives. But in our culture, they have become our '10 and 2' – the baseline for reliably navigating the world. But, at the risk of sounding cliché and insensitive, it need not be this way. What we need is *rest*. But don't just take it from us, take it from Jesus himself, who said these words to people not altogether unlike us: *"Come to me, all who are weary and burdened. And I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*

If you have a background in church, you've probably heard before that a 'yoke' was a wooden harness that bound two oxen together as they were used to plow and work fields. But beasts of burden weren't the only ones who had a yoke. In the Jewish world,

a yoke was also a way of talking about a rabbi's way of life with God – the way he prayed, read Scripture, interpreted the law, followed the commands of God, etc. Read the invitation of Jesus again through that lens. He is inviting us to be with Him and to learn from Him how to live life fully and freely in the presence of God. This is what the Apostle Paul is trying to help the Galatians understand in his famous letter. He writes, “It was for *freedom* that Christ has set us free.”

Believe it or not, the invitation to practice Sabbath is rooted in this very sense of freedom. That probably sounds counterintuitive to those of us who are used to thinking that Sabbath is a burdensome—and outdated—law from the Old Testament. But the writer of Hebrews, in the New Testament, writes to challenge those of us who might be tempted to think that way (see 4:9-11). He writes that Christ has indeed set us free, but that freedom is for the purpose of finding Sabbath rest as the people of God. He then writes, “Let us therefore strive to enter that rest...” The language about striving is very important. It means that finding rest in God is not just something that happens automatically. It requires intentionality, effort, habits, and ways of being in the world that help us experience life with God. At the end of the day, that is why we are making a big deal about the practice of Sabbath. It gives us a way to consistently and conscientiously yoke ourselves to Jesus and His way of life, to receive the blessings of life and freedom in the presence of God.

- **Questions for Discussion (20-30 Minutes)**

1. What grabbed your attention/heart/mind from the weekend talk or leader's summary?
2. Last week, we introduced the rhythm of “stop” along with a few recommended practices. Take a few minutes to debrief as a group. Did anyone try stopping? If so, what? How did it go?
3. (Re)read Matthew 11:28-30 and Galatians 5:1 again. Dialogue about ‘rest’ and ‘freedom’ for a few minutes. What do you think Jesus and/or Paul meant by those statements? Compare that to the ‘tired’ and ‘busy’ culture that Pastor Joseph talked about on Sunday – Do you think it's even possible in our culture to create rhythms of life that don't end up leaving us tired and busy?
4. As a group, talk for a few minutes about rest – Is rest an intentional part of your life right now? If so, what does that look like? If not, what does rest look like for you?
5. On Sunday, we talked about things we do that give the illusion of rest, but which actually perpetuate our problems (e.g. binge watching, doom scrolling social media, shopping, overeating, substance abuse, etc.). In what ways do you rest that actually give you life? Is there anything you do to ‘rest’ that turns out to be more like empty calories?

- **This Week's Practices**

As G.K. Chesterton famously said, "Anything worth doing is worth doing poorly." This is such a helpful reminder to those of us who are learning to practice Sabbath. It will not be perfect this week...or next. But that's okay. Perfection is not the goal. Growing into the fullness of life with God. We will all have unique challenges and opportunities based on our season and stage of life. That's why we are learning together. With that in mind, here are a few helpful tips for practicing rest on the Sabbath

Core Practice:

Identify 1-3 things that you will do to experience rest during Sabbath. If all else fails, sleep is one of the most spiritually significant things we can do for our life with God. Get a good night's sleep and maybe even take a long nap. You probably need it.

Other Practices to Consider:

1 – Day(s) of Preparation

Many of the most experienced practitioners of Sabbath all say the same thing. Treating one day differently will inevitably lead you to live differently on the other six days as well. And the truth about rest is that it's best experienced when we prepare ourselves for it. Consider the following obstacles to rest that may need to be addressed before Sabbath:

- Go grocery shopping and stock your pantry and fridge.
- Prep your meals.
- Clean or tidy your home or apartment.
- Run any errands or pay any bills that need to be sorted before you can rest.
- Answer all your texts and emails in order to power off your devices.
- Make plans to meet your family or community on the Sabbath.
- Plan out some fun activities for play and delight.

2 – Identify the likely sources of 'anti-rest' interruption(s) and temptation(s).

Many of us struggle to rest because our lives are, in a sense, just a long series of interruptions, distractions, and diversions. Some of this is inevitable, but some of it is preventable. So, what *external* sources of resistance will you likely encounter on Sabbath? Where might you be tempted to settle for empty calorie rest during Sabbath? Here are some examples:

- Phone
- Social media
- The internet
- TV and entertainment
- Shopping
- Social obligations
- Sports
- Weekend work
- Chores
- Errands

3 – Prepare for Internal Resistance

Tish Harrison Warren writes, "*If rest is learned through habit and repetition, so is restlessness.*" Unfortunately, for many of us, the biggest obstacle to rest may not be work, kids, or social media. It may be the learned restlessness within our own hearts. Some of us are so habituated to stress, anxiety, worry, and hurry that rest is actually uncomfortable. If we practice Sabbath, these bad habits and heart issues will be exposed, almost like going through withdrawal. This is not a bad thing, but it can be difficult. That's why some of us may benefit from the practice of journaling during the Sabbath. Simply invite the Holy Spirit to illuminate your heart and mind and dialogue with God about what you are thinking, feeling, and experiencing as you learn the habits of resting with Him.

- Close in Prayer (5-10 Minutes)