



Striving to Enter God's Rest

Scripture: Matthew 11:28-30

Sermon Series: N/A

Topic: Rest

Introduction

By all accounts, 2022 was a difficult year for my family and me. It started off with a bang. We had just returned in early January from visiting Rahel's family in Belgium, and our entire family managed to get Covid. This included Rahel's brother, David, who, just a few short months before that, had been diagnosed with late-stage stomach cancer. David spent the first month of the year in the hospital battling Covid, from which he only miraculously recovered (and by "miraculously," I mean miraculously). The next few months saw Rahel flying back and forth to Brussels, David undergoing a much-needed surgery to remove a large tumor from his stomach, and me at home, working a part-time job and trying to juggle three young kids, while somehow finding the time to faithfully serve the church as a new elder.

That summer, we had a chance to visit David again as a family. He had lost a lot of weight, was in constant pain, and still found it difficult to swallow anything. We sat with him, cried with him, laughed with him, sung for him, and hoped with him. Not having been around someone so near death, I don't think any of us knew just how close he was. Just one, short year earlier, he was a vibrant, strong, ever-joyful person full of life (he never lost his joy or wit). Surely, God would answer our prayers and spare his life... or so we thought. It was not to be. David went to be with the Lord a few short weeks after we left.

To compound the grief, the hospital in which David was being treated refused to give him routine end-of-life care, engaging in some of the most callous acts of injustice that I've ever witnessed or read about (that's a story for another day).

With the dirt still unsettled and the flowers still fresh on David's grave, we got news that Rahel's dad had fallen and was in the hospital, lying face down in the ICU, falling in and out of consciousness. Almost 1 month to the day after David's death, Rahel's father past away. And before I knew it, I was back on the plane with the 3 kids (Rahel having gone before us) to attend my father-in-law's funeral. He was buried 2 grave sites down from his son, 2 others having died in that short 1-month period since David's death.

Upon returning in November, I then spent the next month at home with the kids while Rahel, her mom, and her youngest (now only brother) worked on settling their dad's affairs in Ethiopia.

To top things off, the kids once again contracted some rough bouts of Covid, which meant that we couldn't visit my family in the States for Thanksgiving. Sitting at a bare kitchen table on Thanksgiving Day with nothing but a Turkey pot pie in front of me (which Steve and Merri Brown graciously brought by our house)—no extended family, no Rahel, 3 sick kids—I was at perhaps the lowest point of my life.

Now, I don't tell you this story for you to feel sorry for me or my family. And please know that Rahel and I firmly believe that God was in all of the details of that year, working all things for our good and his glory. We were also incredibly blessed by countless acts of kindness from this body. But, I tell you this story because it precipitated in me a desire for something I never expected—rest.

I decided, at the start of 2023, that I would dedicate the year to finding rest. I, of course, had no idea what this meant or how I was going to find something that had been so elusive to me for almost my entire adult life, but I was determined, after having spent the last year in a perpetual state of restlessness, to spend the year in search of whatever it meant to rest.

The Problem

It just so happened that at some point prior to 2022, I had read a book that addressed the need for Christians to slow down in the midst of the chaos of our modern world. The title of that book was *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, and it was written by an admittedly burned-out pastor in Portland, OR, by the name of John Mark Comer.

In his book, Comer highlights what all of us in the western world already know—we are far too busy. And this busyness has led to a restlessness that is unprecedented in human history. In one recent study, for example, 39 percent of Americans reported

being more anxious than they were a year ago (www.psychiatry.org/newsroom/apa-public-opinion-poll-annual-meeting-2018).

Like Neal Postman presciently predicted almost 40 years ago, we are quite literally amusing ourselves to death. What we are told is that the ticket to a successful life is staying busy, staying “ahead of the curve.” When, the reality is that, like Oliver Burkeman writes, “You won’t ever ‘solve busyness’ by becoming more busy” (Burkeman, *4000 Weeks: Time Management for Mortals*). Behind every 1 email replied to are 6 more awaiting your attention.

The sad truth is that busyness actually threatens to *kill* all that we hold dear.

Author Wayne Muller, in his book, *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives*, puts it this way:

“A ‘successful life’ has become a violent enterprise. We make war on our own bodies, pushing them beyond their limits; war on our children, because we cannot find enough time to be with them when they are hurt and afraid, and need our company; war on our spirit, because we are too preoccupied to listen to the quiet voices that seek to nourish and refresh us; war on our communities because we are fearfully protecting what we have, and do not feel safe enough to be kind and generous; war on the earth, because we cannot take the time to place our feet on the ground and allow it to feed us, to taste its blessings and give thanks.”

—Wayne Muller, *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives*

What is Muller getting at? He’s saying that we’ve lost the ability to give attention to anything, to be present in the now. With the rise of social media and smartphones (which, by the way, kids today don’t think in terms of “smartphones”—they are just “phones”; any phone w/o apps, according to my 12-year-old, is not a phone), we’ve lost the ability to concentrate for more than 1 millisecond. Scientists say that the average iPhone user touches his or her phone over 2,500 times a day (<https://>

www.brusselstimes.com/232851/people-touch-their-smartphone-over-2600-times-a-day-research-shows).

I was so upset the other day when I took my oldest daughter to the orthodontist. We were enjoying some quality daddy/daughter time together, sitting in the waiting room, her head resting on my shoulder, when one of the assistants ushered us to one of the chairs in the back.

She then told us that it would be a while longer before the orthodontist saw my daughter and that she felt like we would prefer to wait in the back rather than in the waiting room, at which point she promptly placed a remote in Aster's hand, headphones on her ears, and showed her how to view Disney Plus on the TV dangling precariously directly above her head. Needless to say, that ended all of our daddy/daughter time and made it incredibly annoying when the orthodontist asked her questions about her teeth.

Not only has our society eliminated the possibility of rest and meaningful conversations through the use of distractions, but **we've even found ways to monetize restlessness**. Think of the catalogs and store leaflets that you are no doubt getting inundated with right now this holiday season. It's likely that somewhere in these catalogs, you'll see a photo of a mom and dad peacefully lounging on that plush, gel-infused, memory foam mattress that you've always wanted, their kids having just brought them breakfast in bed on that walnut food tray you know you need. Marketing departments everywhere know you crave a life of peace, ease, calm...margin.

I just encountered this the other day while shopping in a camping store with my family. While I was waiting, I noticed a cookbook on recipes to use while on a camping trip with your family. On the front cover of the book was a family huddled around a small camp stove (only \$19.99), everyone sitting on perfectly sized tree stumps, everyone smiling, kids oozing serenity and calm, one holding a stick with a perfectly put together S'mores on top of it, mom serving up a full course meal that she had had just whipped up with a few twigs and some fish she had no doubt just caught in the nearby stream.

Now, maybe this is what a camping trip meal looks like with your family, but I can assure you that this exact scene has never played out *at our dinner table*, let alone in the woods far away from the closest kitchen.

What are these advertiser's selling us? Rest.

Comer, in his book, likes to say that this new speed of life that many Christians have become accustomed to isn't Christian at all, in fact, it's very much anti-Christ (Comer, 22).

If you think about it, rest is central to being a Christian.

What's the highest value in God's economy? Love, right? Thus, the greatest commandment: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength and love your neighbor as yourself. But, guess what, love is time consuming. Do you remember Paul's first descriptor of his definition of love in 1 Corinthians 13? That's right, love is *patient*. And patience requires rest.

All parents of small children, married couples, and long-term friends know this well.

My worst moments as a father and husband have come in those times in which I'm most tired. *Everything* is a big deal when I'm tired. I crumble at the slightest offense. In contrast, I can put up with almost anything when I've rested. "Oh, the cat just knocked over his water bowl again for the 3rd time this week and left a puddle of water on our hardwood floor that has been sitting there for a day and a half without anyone telling me? No problem. No trouble at all. Kids, don't worry about it. Here, hand me the mop, let me clean that right up for you."

All kidding aside, we all know this to be true. And while I'm sure it's the case that some require less sleep than others, we could all use more sleep.

But true spiritual rest, as I've come to find out, is more than just 8 hours of sleep a night. The problem of being physically exhausted is certainly part of the problem. But what about the restlessness of our souls? How do we recover rest for our souls? After my year of restlessness and dark night of the soul in 2022, this is what I really craved.

What does Augustine, writing centuries ago, really mean when he says that "our hearts are restless until they find their rest in [God]?" (*Confessions*, 1, 1.5)

Well, I think a good place to start is in Matthew 11:28-30.

An Easy Yoke – Matthew 11:28-30

Read with me.

Then Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.”

—Matthew 11:28-30, NLT

I love Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase of this passage in the Message translation. He says it like this:

“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”

—Matthew 11:28-30, MSG

I love that line—"I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you." It makes me think of David refusing to put on the coat of armor that his fellow soldiers assured him he needed in order to defeat the enemy of God, Goliath. It makes me think of a loving parent who doesn't burden their child with things too heavy for them to process at too early an age.

Like many of you, I grew up with this verse. I'd heard it a million times. And every time I heard it I felt a sense of calm inside, but, I'll be honest, I had no earthly idea what Jesus meant when he said his yoke was "easy."

The secret of the "easy yoke," as it turns out, however, is actually quite obvious.

Here's how Dallas Willard talks about this secret:

"In this truth lies the secret of the easy yoke: the secret involves living as [Jesus] lived in the entirety of his life—adopting his overall life-style. . . .

Our mistake is to think that following Jesus consists in loving our enemies, going the 'second mile,' turning the other cheek, suffering patiently and hopefully—while living the rest of our lives just as everyone else around us does. . . . It's a strategy bound to fail."

—Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*

Simplified—as John Mark Comer puts it—"If you want to experience the *life* of Jesus, you have to adopt the *lifestyle* of Jesus" (82).

“If you want to experience the **life of Jesus, you have to adopt the **lifestyle** of Jesus.”**

—John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*

The way of Jesus is just that—it is a way. It is more than just a set of ideas or an ethical code for living. It is a lifestyle. And here is the kicker—**your life is a by-product of your lifestyle.**

James Clear, who wrote the viral book on habits entitled, *Atomic Habits*, gets to the core of what I think this means when he writes that something becomes habitual when you begin to identify yourself with that habit. There’s a moment, Clear says, usually after about 6 months of doing something consistently, in which you say to yourself, “I am said habit”—“I am a person who works out,” “I am a person who is generous,” etc. This is the point at which the habit “sticks.”

In the same way, if you want the easy yoke of Jesus, you must put in the time it takes to adopt the lifestyle of Jesus. Only then will you begin to say to yourself, “I am a follower of Jesus” and begin to experience the rest that Jesus talks about.

Some of you may know that I play guitar. When I was younger, guitar playing was one among many of my hobbies, but I always dreamed of becoming an expert guitarist. For those of you who play the guitar, you know that there is a honeymoon period of about 4-6 months, where you learn a couple of chords and you’re instantly able to play 90% of all praise and worship music. This, of course, is just a tease because the plateau comes quickly and you know that in order to advance to the next step—bar chords,

picking, different strumming patterns, riffing a cool lead part—hours of practice will be needed.

Once I hit this plateau, I remember, when I was younger, on more than one occasion, having the thought: “Jesus, if by some miraculous means, you would allow me to wake up in the morning and instantly be able to play the guitar like Jon Foreman, the lead singer for Switchfoot (ok, you probably know that) I will use my guitar playing for your glory!”

To use one of our own musicians as an example, I wanted the ability to play an instrument like Nate Brown plays the cello without putting in the time and hard work that it takes to play a cello like Nate Brown.

Okay, I know what you’re thinking.

Hours of practice. Hard work.

Chris, this doesn’t sound like rest.

Yes, but that’s because we’ve been trained to think that “rest” is a day off, the ability to sleep in or binge Netflix documentaries until we reach a comatose state. This is certainly how I viewed rest for much of my life.

Hear these words from scholar Frederick Bruner about the nature of the easy yoke:

“A yoke is a work instrument. Thus when Jesus offers a yoke he offers what we might think tired workers need least. They need a mattress or a vacation, not a yoke. But Jesus realizes that the most restful gift he can give the tired is a new way to carry life, a fresh way to bear responsibilities. . . . Realism sees that life is a succession of burdens; we cannot get away from them; thus instead of offering escape, Jesus offers equipment. Jesus means that obedience to his Sermon on the mount [his yoke] will develop in us a balance and a ‘way’ of carrying life that will give more rest than the way we have been living.”

—Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew, A Commentary*

Did you catch that? Jesus gives us a “new way to carry life.” **He offers us equipment rather than an escape.**

And the beauty of this *equipment* is that it’s free. There’s no subscription fee attached.

The only question now is what does this free equipment looks like?

Well, as God would have it, we’ve just finished walking through Jesus’ sermon on the mount here at Hope. While it may be more, it certainly is not less than obedience to Jesus’ teachings in this sermon.

Look with me again at Matthew 11:28-30. If you keep reading in your Bibles, you’ll notice that Jesus, immediately after saying that his yoke is easy, begins to talk about the Sabbath.

An Unlikely Source – Genesis 2:2-3

Now, I don’t know about you, but my experience with the Sabbath practice growing up in the Southern Baptist South was non-existent. It was never talked about. It wasn’t until earlier this year, after learning that Comer had started a ministry called “Practicing the Way” that looked at 9 ancient practices of Jesus and the early church that I began to explore the ancient practice of the Sabbath.

With this in mind, I want to share a few things with you that we’ve been learning as a LIFE group over the past few months about the Sabbath practice and why I believe that following Jesus’ practice of Sabbath-keeping offers the kind of rest that we all need and crave.

First off, the word “Sabbath” or *Shabbat* in Hebrew, literally means “to stop” or in some cases, it can also be translated “to delight.”

The idea behind this is simple: no matter what you’re doing, what you have coming up, one day a week, you just STOP—you stop the hustle, you stop the grind, you stop the consumption, you stop the use of devices, you just stop.

Like I said, this is an *ancient* practice. In fact, it goes all the way back to the beginning.

Let’s look at Genesis 2:2-3:

On the seventh day God had finished his work of creation, so he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because it was the day when he rested from all his work of creation.

—Genesis 2v2-3, NLT

Comer, in his book, points out what is perhaps the most clear and yet astonishingly insightful thing about this passage—the simple truth that “God rested” (153). Let *that* sink in.

When I first began thinking about what it might look like for our busy family of 5 to observe the Sabbath, a million excuses for why this could never work popped into my head. But at the end of every one was a still, small voice whispering, “God rested.”

God has just completed the task of literally creating the entire universe in six days. So, what does he do on the seventh? He creates rest. He builds a rhythm, a syncopated beat—work 6 days, rest 1—into the fabric of creation. And, by consequence, to fight this rhythm, this design, leads to restlessness.

Beyond this, what can it possibly mean that God rested? Was he burned out? Tired?

If you remember, I mentioned earlier that the Hebrew word *Shabbat* can also be translated “to delight.” In the Sabbath practice material that we’ve been looking at as a LIFE group, we discovered that there are 4 stages of Sabbath keeping that often build on one another. The first stage is to **stop**, the second is to **rest**, and the third is to **delight**. The final stage, which we will look at in just a minute, is **worship**.

There is something transformative that happens when you stop and rest in God—you begin to delight in his creation and, most importantly, in him. In short, after creating the universe, God spent a day delighting in what he had created.

It's a far cry from delighting in creating the universe, but it's kind of like what you may do after mowing your grass. If you're like me, you grab some water, sit on the back porch, and admire all that you just did (trying not to notice that one spot you always miss—how does that always happen?).

Now, if you do a study on the Sabbath in Scripture, you'll find that there are several Sabbath commands in Scripture, but what I would like for us to do now is to look at two of the most important ones.

The Two Most Important Sabbath Commands

1. Sabbath As Rest and Worship — Exodus 20:8-11

Turn with me, if you will, to Exodus 20:8-11. One of the unique things about the Sabbath command here is that it is the only spiritual discipline that is commanded in the 10 commandments. When God gives Moses the 10 commandments, you'll notice there is no command to read your Bible more, go to church, pray a certain number of times a day. No, just the command to rest. Which, if you think about it, is a gracious gift on par with, say, commanding your children to eat ice cream.

Let's read verses 8-11, which, by the way, if you were to break it down, comprises about 30% of the 10 commandments:

“Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the LORD your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you. For in six days the LORD made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them; but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy.”

—Exodus 20:8-11, NLT

There's much that could be said here, but I want us to focus on the idea that the seventh day is a day of rest "dedicated to the Lord."

"Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but **the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the LORD your God**. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you. For in six days the LORD made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them; but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy."

—Exodus 20v8-11, NLT

In other words, the Sabbath is a day set apart to the Lord. It is not suppose to look like the other six. It's a day that all of the other six days point toward. It's the day I pray that our family will one day look forward to more than any other day of the week. It's a day to delight in God's goodness. Put simply, it's a day of worship.

And when I say "worship" I don't just mean singing, although it can certainly include that. I mean that holistic, all-of-life, presenting-your-body-as-a-spritual-act kind of worship—a complete posturing of your heart toward thanking God for all he's done.

To help you understand the kind of worship I'm talking about, I want to share with you what I believe to be one of the most profound definitions of worship you will ever find. It comes from novelist and English professor David Foster Wallace, who, to my knowledge, did not know Jesus. In a now famous commencement address that he gave in 2005, Foster Wallace says this about worship:

“[I]n the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship. And the compelling reason for maybe choosing some sort of god or spiritual-type thing to worship—be it JC or Allah, be it YHWH or the Wiccan Mother Goddess, or the Four Noble Truths, or some inviolable set of ethical principles—is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive. If you worship money and things, if they are where you tap real meaning in life, then you will never have enough, never feel you have enough. It’s the truth. Worship your body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly. And when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally grieve you. . . .

Worship power, you will end up feeling weak and afraid, and you will need ever more power over others to numb you to your own fear. Worship your intellect, being seen as smart, you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out. But the insidious thing about these forms of worship is not that they’re evil or sinful, it’s that they’re unconscious. They are default settings.”

—David Foster Wallace, *This is Water*, 2005 commencement speech to the graduating class at Kenyon College

Foster Wallace begins his address rather comically with 2 young fish who encounter an older fish. The older fish, as he passes by, says, “Morning, boys, how’s the water?” The

two younger fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes, “What the heck is water?”

The point of the fish story and his address is that the most obvious, important realities are often the ones that are hardest to see.

It’s not a question of *Do you worship?* We all worship. The question is *What do you worship?*

The answer to this question is all-important because **you are what you worship.**

The Sabbath is a means of reorienting our worship back to where it belongs, back to where it was created to reside.

So, the first Sabbath command we see is the command to rest and worship. What about the second?

Sabbath As Resistance — Deuteronomy 5:12-14

The second Sabbath command can be found in a somewhat unlikely place. You may not know this, but the 10 commandments are listed twice in the OT—once in Exodus and once in Deuteronomy. By the time Moses delivers the 10 commandments to the people for the second time, they have just spent 40 years in the wilderness; a new generation has come up, one with little memory of what God did at Mount Sinai.

Turn with me to Deuteronomy 5:12-14. There, we read, “Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you.” Stop right there.

“Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the LORD your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your oxen and donkeys and other livestock, and any foreigners living among you. All your male and female servants must rest as you do. Remember that you were once slaves in Egypt, but the LORD your God brought you out with his strong hand and powerful arm. That is why the LORD your God has commanded you to rest on the Sabbath day.”

—Deuteronomy 5v12-14, NLT

Did you notice the first difference in the two lists? That’s right. Moses’ uses the word “observe” rather than “remember.”

“**Observe** the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the LORD your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your oxen and donkeys and other livestock, and any foreigners living among you. All your male and female servants must rest as you do. Remember that you were once slaves in Egypt, but the LORD your God brought you out with his strong hand and powerful arm. That is why the LORD your God has commanded you to rest on the Sabbath day.”

—Deuteronomy 5v12-14, NLT

Moses is keen to have this new generation “observe” the Sabbath day. Meaning what? Meaning that they are to observe it like they would any other holy day or holiday. It’s a day that you prepare for in advance and approach with anticipation.

If you were to ask anyone in our LIFE group, What has been the most challenging part of trying to observe a regular Sabbath? it’s likely that they would respond by saying something along the lines of “Preparing for the day in advance.” After several fails—and by “fails,” I mean epic fails—our family learned pretty quickly that you can’t just fit Sabbath into your already busy schedule and expect much from it.

The harsh truth?

Learning to rest takes work.

Hebrews 4:9-11 is a well known verse on the Sabbath. While we don’t have time to unpack all that the author of Hebrews is doing here, look at how he exhorts us to enter God’s rest:

So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.

—Hebrews 4:9-11, ESV

That’s right. He said it. Strive.

So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. Let us therefore **strive** to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.

—Hebrews 4v9-11, ESV

Cultivating a spirit of rest takes intentionality.

We've got a long way to go, but, as a family, we're working on being more intentional about how we prepare for our time of Sabbath on Saturday nights—freeing up our calendars, putting off any outstanding emails or texts that can wait until Sunday night, finishing up sermons, and thinking of creative ways to delight in each other and in God.

I love how Walter Brueggeman describes the countenance and way-of-being of those who take the time to abide in God's presence one day a week. He writes,

“People who sabbath live all seven days differently.”

—Walter Brueggeman, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now*

Maybe you know someone like this. If so, there's a good chance that he or she practices the Sabbath. I'm sure this could be said of Jesus, and he sabbathed. My hope is that this can one day be said of me and my family.

Let's continue reading:

“Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the LORD your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your oxen and donkeys and other livestock, and any foreigners living among you. All your male and female servants must rest as you do. Remember that you were once slaves in Egypt, but the LORD your God brought you out with his strong hand and powerful arm. That is why the LORD your God has commanded you to rest on the Sabbath day.”

—Deuteronomy 5v12-14, NLT

Here, we see what amounts to a more significant shift from the earlier command in Exodus. At the close of the command, Moses reminds them of how God delivered them from the hands of the Egyptians.

“Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the LORD your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your oxen and donkeys and other livestock, and any foreigners living among you. All your male and female servants must rest as you do. Remember that you were once slaves in Egypt, but the LORD your God brought you out with his strong hand and powerful arm. That is why the LORD your God has commanded you to rest on the Sabbath day.”

—Deuteronomy 5v12-14, NLT

What is Moses doing?

In essence, he is grounding the Sabbath command in Exodus in the *creation* story—in the idea that God has created a rhythm in which creation can flourish—and here he is grounding it in the *Exodus* story—the story of how the Israelites, who were once slaves, are now free to worship their God.

But why?

This was the first generation of Israelites to grow up in freedom. All their parents had known was the 24/7 back-breaking work of placing one large stone on top of another, always living in fear that their firstborn sons would be murdered, all in an effort to satiate the Egyptian empire’s lust for more. Exodus tells us that Egypt even created entire store *cities* to house all the excess wealth they had accumulated (1:11).

Slaves don’t rest, let alone Sabbath. Oppressed people are seen as nothing more than a line item on a spreadsheet, a commodity to be traded.

If this is sounding eerily similar, then you may see where I’m going.

Egypt is alive and well.

Our society's insatiable lust for more at the expense of others—*more* food, *more* clothes, *more* apps to “simplify” our lives, *more* stamps on our passports—is no different from that of Egypt.

Listen to how John Mark Comer makes this connection:

“Just like Egypt, we’re an empire built on the oppression of the poor. In America’s case (and many other nations), literally. What’s more, we’ve found a way to do slavery guilt-free. We like to think slavery ended in 1865, but the reality is, we just moved it overseas. Out of (our) sight; out of mind. There are twenty-eight million slaves in the world today, more than were ever trafficked in the transcontinental slave trade of the eighteenth century. The odds are, your home or apartment is full of stuff they’ve produced: a T-shirt, a pair of kicks, that clock on the wall, those bananas.”

—John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*

Ouch. He’s talking to you and me. He’s talking to the vast majority of Christians content to go through the motions of going to church and doing the occasional good deed.

He’s talking to those swimming in water who have no earthly idea what water is.

So, what does this have to do with Sabbath?

Here’s the second command: Sabbath is, what Walter Brueggeman likes to call, “an act of resistance.” It’s an act of rebellion against Pharaoh and his army and the insatiable desire for more. It’s a willingness to draw a line in the sand and say “Enough.”

It’s a way of saying “God is enough for me.”

I love those lines from the song, "Jireh," by Maverick City:

I'm already loved
I'm already chosen
I know who I am
I know what you have spoken
I'm already loved
More than I could imagine
And that is enough

One of the quotes that really resonated with many in our group as we studied the Sabbath practice is a quote by theologian Marva Dawn. Dawn writes, "We don't know how to *feast* because we don't know how to *fast*" (*The Sense of the Call: A Sabbath Way of Life for Those Who Serve God, the Church, and the World*, 187). The reality is that feasting on God and his goodness is much harder when you've been stuffing yourself with all that the world has to offer during the week.

Let me tell you from experience—to fully enjoy the seventh day it helps to slow down the other six.

Conclusion

As we conclude this morning, I suppose the danger in preaching a sermon on rest is that I may unintentionally give the impression that I've got this all figured out. If you think that's the case, I would just invite you to come visit my house at 5 pm on a Saturday night. That should be enough to dispel any myth that our family has arrived.

But one thing I've learned over this past year of sojourning is that my soul will never be at rest until I'm content with what God has given me and where he has placed me.

Catholic theologian Ronald Rolheiser is helpful here. He writes,

“So much of our unhappiness comes from comparing our lives, our friendships, our loves, our commitments, our duties, our bodies and our sexuality to some idealized and non-Christian vision of things which falsely assures us that there is a heaven on earth.

When that happens, and it does, our tensions begin to drive us mad, in this case to a cancerous restlessness. True restfulness, though, is a form of awareness, a way of being in life. It is living an ordinary life with a sense of ease, gratitude, appreciation, peace and prayer. We are restful when ordinary life is enough.”

—Ronald Rolheiser, *Forgotten Among the Lillies: Learning to Love Beyond Our Fears*

Anybody else resonate with that last line—“We are restful when ordinary life is enough?”

“So much of our unhappiness comes from comparing our lives, our friendships, our loves, our commitments, our duties, our bodies and our sexuality to some idealized and non-Christian vision of things which falsely assures us that there is a heaven on earth.

When that happens, and it does, our tensions begin to drive us mad, in this case to a cancerous restlessness. True restfulness, though, is a form of awareness, a way of being in life. It is living an ordinary life with a sense of ease, gratitude, appreciation, peace and prayer. **We are restful when ordinary life is enough.”**

—Ronald Rolheiser, *Forgotten Among the Lillies: Learning to Love Beyond Our Fears*

How true that is.

The other danger, I suppose, in preaching on the need for Christians to practice the Sabbath is that I might give the impression that Sabbath is a binding command for all Christians. Suffice it to say, there is some debate among theologians over whether keeping the Sabbath is mandated in the NT. But, as Jesus so poetically puts it, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27).

A day of rest and delight each week is a gracious gift of God.

For this reason, my family and I have decided, no matter how imperfect the execution, to keep practicing the Sabbath.

As we close, I would encourage you as well to consider entering in to this Sabbath rest that God has provided. It will look different at different seasons of life—just ask our LIFE group—but if you’ve reached your limit of Amazon packages on the front doorstep or notifications on your phone, you may want to pray about what it would look like for you to take on the easy yoke of Jesus and find true rest for your soul by practicing the Sabbath.

Let’s pray.