

Rest

A Devotional by Megan Babayco

Before electricity, the day began and ended with the sun. A generation or two ago, there was a day set aside for rest built into the rhythm of our communities. But today, we live in a world where rest is seen as weakness, or a personal lack of importance. Who has time to rest? Ironically, we find in scripture the answer, God does. God has time for rest. And perhaps this means that rest is a gift from our loving Father for us to enjoy and delight in.

Rest is a life-altering rhythm. One that will change not just the day or time we take to experience it, but all the days and moments after. The Biblical word for the spiritual practice of rest is sabbath. The practice of sabbath is about stopping, resting, delighting in, and worshipping God. In practicing sabbath we learn that we are not as important as we think we are, and that time set apart to be with God will change the way we live and even the way we see the world. Who has time for that? I hope we all do.

Rest: Day 1 - Exodus 20:8-10

⁸ “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns.

Most people don’t enter into the practice of spiritual disciplines through sabbath, but that’s exactly what I did. I heard a sermon on this passage where the pastor posed the question, “why is this the only one of the ten commandments that we brag about breaking? Where along the history of the church, did we decide that this no longer applied to us?”¹

I was hooked. After those words I looked at the pace and rhythm of my life and felt convicted. This was what I needed: rest, time with God, a day to stop. And so, as a family we tried it. I remember that first day being skeptical as I powered down my phone and got ready to have a whole day set aside with no chores or work, no “shoulds” at all. I’m not going to lie, it was hard. Way harder than I ever imagined it would be. I didn’t know how to do nothing. I didn’t know what was allowed and what wasn’t. I still had two small children with very real needs and demands and I didn’t know how to rest and mother them at the same time. But we committed to trying it for several weeks before we gave up, and slowly it got easier. We figured out what worked for us and eventually it started to feel like a weekly Christmas morning—something we longed for and delighted in.

But this practice of rest, goes against every fiber of my being. Even to this day, after years of practicing it, it feels foreign. But I also love it and mourn weeks where it doesn’t happen. There is something holy in a day of rest. Something that speaks to our souls and to the God who lovingly created us. We need rest.

If God can do it, I can. And if I can, you can too. So often people who hear that my family practices sabbath look at me like I am from another planet. They say, “that’s nice” or “that sounds great, but I couldn’t possibly.” I always bite my tongue from saying back, “You can possibly. If God can, you can.” Just try it and keep trying it, even if it feels foreign at first. It takes time to learn this new rhythm of grace.

Reading Question: Do you ever brag about how tired or busy you are? One-up your friends on how little sleep or rest you’ve gotten recently?

Try This: Sometimes scheduling is the first step. Set aside a few hours, half a day, or even better, a full one to rest with God this week.

¹ I can’t remember which sermon it was exactly but I believe it was one in the series on Sabbath at Bridgetown Church in Portland, OR where John Mark Comer is the pastor.

Rest: Day 2 - Genesis 2:1-3

¹ Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.

² By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. ³ Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

God loves us enough to give us a rhythm that brings life. It's a rhythm of work and rest. That's the model God gives us way back in the book of Genesis. God worked over six days to create the world and at the end he rested. Both are important –work, rest, work, rest, repeat. When we work, we work to the glory of God, but when we rest it is also to God's glory. There is a beautiful balance to the rhythm of time laid out in the very first book of the Bible.

All cultures around the world have a seven-day week. Several different ones across the globe, with no contact with each other and very different reasoning, all designed their calendars with seven days. Other cultures throughout history have tried to change it but still it persists. As recently as 1929 the USSR attempted to change the week to 5 and then 6 days for more productivity but it was ultimately a disaster.²

Seven is a strange number to use to track time. Unlike our day, which is defined by the time it takes the earth to spin on its' axis or our year, which is the time it takes the earth to travel around the sun, there is no real reason for a week to be seven days. But perhaps there is a reason beyond what we can reason, the rhythm in our souls put there by our Creator.

We have lost this rhythm and so we have lost ourselves. We will never be at peace or experience true joy until we learn to live by God's rhythms. And rest is built into the rhythm God gave our bodies and souls.

And not only did God rest, but he blessed that day for his creation. For our good, for our enjoyment, for our delight we have the seventh day. Let's enjoy it!

Reading Question: This is the first time in scripture that something is declared 'holy'. What does it mean that time, a day, is holy?

Try This: Watch the sunrise or the sunset today. As you do, contemplate all the various rhythms found in nature. The seasons, the tides, the cycles of life and death. Praise God for the way time and rhythm are built into the fabric of our lives.

² <https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/why-cant-we-get-rid-of-the-7day-week>

Rest: Day 3 - Deuteronomy 5:12-15

¹² “Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. ¹³ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁴ but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns, so that your male and female servants may rest, as you do. ¹⁵ Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.

Rest is a privilege. Slaves don't get a day off. To be enslaved is to have no time that is your own, to constantly be on the timeline of someone else, constantly meeting their needs over your own. Israel knew what it was like to be enslaved. In Egypt, their lives were governed by the whims and greed of Pharaoh. There was always more to do and no freedom to stop producing. But God freed the Israelites from their servitude to Pharaoh. And God led them, by Moses, through the wilderness and to the edge of the promised land. But before they entered it, Moses reminds them of everything they have learned from God on the journey.

When Moses recounts the ten commandments here in the book of Deuteronomy, he looks back on Israel's past in order to encourage them with another reason to practice rest. Rest is a form of resistance.³ By resting, Israel is not only obeying God's command, they are saying 'no' to the economy of consumption, and the social structure of Egypt. They are claiming their freedom in God who rescued them from Pharaoh and brought them here to the edge of the Jordan.

For us, rest is also a form of resistance. Our culture does not value rest. We value production, we value busyness, we value accomplishments, we value independence, we value consumerism. But God values something different: our thriving. God's desire is that we would not simply live, but thrive. which comes through resting in him. When we say 'yes' to sabbath we are saying 'no' to the demands of our culture. We are saying 'yes' to the life God desires for us and 'no' to all those things that don't bring fulfillment.

In Christ we are no longer slaves, we are free. So do not let the yoke of slavery bind you again.

Reading Question: Is there anything in your life you feel enslaved to? Your job? Your email? The expectations of others?

Try This: Make a list of things that give you life and things that drain life from you. Imagine a day where you only do things that bring you life.

³ For more on this, see Walter Bruggeman's *Sabbath as Resistance*.

Rest: Day 4 – Exodus 16:23-30

²³ He said to them, “This is what the LORD commanded: ‘Tomorrow is to be a day of sabbath rest, a holy sabbath to the LORD. So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning.’”

²⁴ So they saved it until morning, as Moses commanded, and it did not stink or get maggots in it. ²⁵ “Eat it today,” Moses said, “because today is a sabbath to the LORD. You will not find any of it on the ground today. ²⁶ Six days you are to gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will not be any.”

²⁷ Nevertheless, some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather it, but they found none. ²⁸ Then the LORD said to Moses, “How long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions? ²⁹ Bear in mind that the LORD has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where they are on the seventh day; no one is to go out.” ³⁰ So the people rested on the seventh day.

After Egypt, the Israelites had a hard time grasping the idea of a sabbath. They had a hard time with anything that required such trust in God. I think we can relate to this. They were so used to having to provide for themselves that the idea that God would miraculously send manna from Heaven was hard to grasp. And when the food did appear, they tried to store it up for the next day also. But God, of course, had other plans. He gave them a “sabbath rest”, a “holy sabbath” that they would have to “bear in mind” and remember over and over again was a gift for them. Maybe it wasn’t a gift they wanted, but it was what they needed.

Can you imagine the Roman or Greek god’s giving people a sabbath? Most of us don’t know much about ancient Near Eastern gods but maybe we have some concept of Zeus or Hermes. All religions at the time involved a similar understanding of deities. To these gods’ humans existed to amuse them or work for them. They would never do something so overtly for humanity’s own good as the sabbath. Sabbath points to the benevolence of God. It exists for our benefit, not for God’s. Worship is part of the sabbath but first and foremost, the sabbath is about stopping and resting which are about our needs. Like manna from heaven, once again, God is providing purely for our sake. But we don’t know what to do with such a gift.

Reading Question: What does this passage and the concept of sabbath reveal about the character of God?

Try This: Sabbath has a way of revealing our sins of self-reliance and self-importance. We think that things can’t survive without us even for a day. Make a list today of all the things that you believe can’t go a day without your attention.

Rest: Day 5 -Ecclesiastes 2:22-23 (NLT)

²² So what do people get in this life for all their hard work and anxiety? ²³ Their days of labor are filled with pain and grief; even at night their minds cannot rest. It is all meaningless.

I have a gift of being able to sleep pretty much whenever and wherever I want. It's rare that I toss and turn for more than ten minutes before I conk out at night. But more and more I keep hearing of friends and family members who are struggling to sleep. One was telling me about the wonders of Benadryl. Another swears by CBD supplements, but only if there is a small dose of THC in it or if you combine the supplement with lavender essential oil. Just hearing about insomnia is exhausting and I am full of pity and compassion towards those who struggle with it. But I wonder why so many people struggle to sleep? Our bodies need rest. Yet, we have become a culture that has to medicate itself to rest! Not only do we fill our days with more and more production and activity, but it begins to creep into our nights too. When we hear of a famous CEO that has adapted to function on 3 hours of sleep, we marvel at the time he has gained and fault our need for 6-8 hours plus a good cup or two of coffee to be inferior.

Ecclesiastes gives us a great reminder, that this is meaningless! Down that path is no more joy or peace or satisfaction. It will only ever bring more grief and pain and stress. Why would we do that to ourselves? Because everyone else is?

The way of Jesus confronts the status quo of our world and pushes us to ask "why?" Does it make us more loving? Does it help us know God more? If that answer is "no", then it isn't worth it, regardless of how many people think it is. As followers of Jesus, we are meant to look different. What if rest is a witness to God's love and goodness and provision for us?

Reading Question: Do you lay awake at night worrying? How has worrying ever changed the outcome of what you are worrying about?

Try This: As you lay in bed tonight, in prayer go through your day. Whenever something comes to mind that you are stressed or worried about give that thing up to God. Keep going through your day until the end. Notice moments where God has felt close. Notice moments where you wanted to do something you didn't. When you are done recognize the gift that today was. Give it all to God and go to sleep.

Rest: Day 6 – Psalm 62:1

Truly my soul finds rest in God;
my salvation comes from him.

Lately I've been stressed. I've been worrying about how long the coronavirus pandemic will last? What will happen next in our country that has become so divided? I worry about my children and the effects that technology and especially social media are having on children everywhere. And I've been worrying about my church. We received some incredible gifts awhile back and yet we can't seem to figure out a vision and direction of where God might be leading. And then the other day I had a conversation with someone who is under the same pressures to have answers for all the wrongs of the world and he told me he was up at 3:00am thinking about it all. And then he remembered to pray. To devote himself to prayer in the places where we don't know how to move forward. And he was reminded of God's faithfulness in always leading us through it. Then he ended by telling me that as soon as he remembered all of that, he had no trouble falling asleep.

I needed that reminder. Perhaps you do as well. Our soul will find rest in God alone. Sometimes life is hard. Sometimes there are monumental decisions to be made. Sometimes falling on our knees is the only answer. But there is peace and rest to be found there. Give to God all that is on your heart today and may his grace cover you again.

Reading Question: Is your soul restless today?

Try This: This verse is my favorite breath prayer. Throughout the day try using it to find peace and rest in Jesus.

Breath in: In God alone, *breath out:* My soul finds rest.

Breath in: In God alone, *breath out:* my soul finds rest.

Rest: Day 7 – Psalm 46:10

He says, “Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth.”

A week ago, my husband asked me, “what do you do in your silence and solitude with God?” This is a significant question because, not only have we been married for nine years, but we are also both pastors, and until now we had never talked about the structure of our time with God. We as a church have neglected to train each other or to make conversations like this normative, so privatized has our faith become. But what followed after Tyson’s questions was a rich conversation of different ways of being with God and resting in his presence. My favorite practice Tyson does, which I had never heard of or known that he did, I’m calling “swipe right.” When he is trying to be still and silent with God and instead keeps being bombarded by other thoughts or ideas, he simply swipes right to delete them, much like how I quickly clean up the ridiculous number of junk emails cluttering my inbox. Swipe—delete. Swipe—delete. Sometimes, he admitted, he actually motions with his hand in the air as he lets the thought go to again be still with God. I was delighted by this modern day “swipe right” practice and have since adopted it into my own time with God.

It is hard to practice stillness, presence, and rest in God. Perhaps we are meant to lean on each other to learn how to let go so that we might rest for a few minutes in Christ’s loving embrace.

Reading Question: Do you have a hard time quieting your soul to be still and rest in God’s presence?

Try This: Close your eyes and be still with God. As other thoughts enter your head simply swipe – delete them and focus again on stillness. Try accompanying the idea with a hand gesture to help let go of the thought the way we delete our emails. Sit in still silence for 5 minutes.

Rest: Day 8 – 1 Kings 19:3-9

³ Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, ⁴ while he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." ⁵ Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep.

All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." ⁶ He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.

⁷ The angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." ⁸ So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. ⁹ There he went into a cave and spent the night.

And the word of the LORD came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

When we don't rest, our bodies have a way of forcing it upon us. In seminary and before that, in college, every finals week or immediately after, I got sick. This ruined many holidays with family and vacation plans, but after the stress and busyness of yet another semester of study my body rebelled and insisted on rest in the form of a cold forcing me to spend a day or two on the couch doing nothing.

We forget that rest is vital to our health and wellness not just our souls. Elijah in this passage reminds us of that. In the chapter before this on Mount Carmel he was part of an amazing moment where God showed up and the people turned away from other gods to worship Yahweh again. But immediately after this powerful moment of encounter the people went back to life as usual and the poles to other gods remained on their hilltops. And here is the beginning of Elijah's frustration. He feels like he is the only faithful one left, and now Ahab and Jezebel are trying to kill him. Elijah is understandable spent. He is frustrated with the Israelites; he is afraid for his life. He is discouraged, exhausted, and ready to be done with this prophet-thing. So, what does God do? He gives him rest and an angel waits on him.

Sometimes the thing we need before we can grow closer to God, or gain new insight or discernment into the direction of our life is rest. Only when we embrace our humanness can we live into the divine and holy calling God has for us. We are not spiritual beings stuck in a body, our body and bodily needs are part of us. Listen to your body. What is it telling you?

Reading Question: Read through 1 Kings 18 and 19. How is God using this moment to move Elijah from what came before into what comes ahead? How would you feel if you were in Elijah's shoes?

Try This: Close your eyes and take a few breaths. Become aware of your body. What are you feeling? Are there places of soreness or tension? Are your eyes heavy in want of sleep? Our bodies have a way of telling us what we need. What is your body telling you today?

Rest: Day 9 – Mark 6:30-34

³⁰The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. ³¹Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”

³²So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. ³³But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. ³⁴When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

The word “sabbath” which in Hebrew is *shabbat* means to cease or to stop. But when we stop the world keeps moving. I remember one sabbath where, as usual, we turned off our phones and put them away on the counter. At the time, our sabbath was Thursday dinner until Friday after dinner (working at a church makes Sunday sabbaths difficult and our children were young enough not to be in school on Fridays). I don’t remember the sabbath, I’m sure it was great as usual. But I do remember turning our phones back on Friday evening. We instantly knew we missed something important. Our president had not only been diagnosed with COVID-19 he was also now hospitalized. It didn’t take long to catch up on the day’s events. Obviously, this was big news, but finding out a day late didn’t change anything. There was nothing we could do about it and perhaps not knowing made our rest sweeter. There was no sense of added anxiety because of these monumental events.

There have been other moments over the years we’ve missed but most of our friends and family know how to find us if we were truly needed. Knowing the world will survive a day without us reminds us that we aren’t in charge anyway. We aren’t as vital or important as we like to pretend or imagine. That email can wait. The person who called can find out the answer to their question some other way or wait another day. Someone else can fill in.

Yet, occasionally there are things that cannot wait and some sabbaths we have had to postpone or skip all together. I miss the rest on those weeks but my connection to God is stronger than a day. And we all need a lot more grace than we often allow ourselves. Jesus knew when he was needed but he also valued rest. We could all value rest a little bit more.

Reading Question: When the disciples returned to Jesus full of news of the kingdom, he immediately responded by calling them to rest. Do you take time to rejuvenate after seasons or days of work?

Try This: Spend a day resting from technology. No phone, email or social media for 24 hours. (If that isn’t possible today, plan to do it some other day this week.)

Rest: Day 10 – Psalm 4:8

In peace I will lie down and sleep, for You alone, LORD, make me dwell in safety.

When we finally stop, our need for rest catches up with us. Life is exhausting. All week long we work—at work and at home. We juggle deadlines and play dates, schoolwork and housework. So, when we finally stop, often our first need is an incredibly primal one: sleep. It's not uncommon for me to fall asleep hours before normal on our sabbath, sometimes right after putting the kids to bed after we've all had our start-of-sabbath dinner. And the next day most of the family takes an afternoon nap.

A few weeks ago, my husband couldn't stop napping. He got up with everyone in the morning and then fell back asleep within the hour. Later, he said he was going to shower to wake up and we found him sprawled on the bed, sleeping instead. When he put our youngest down for a nap, he fell asleep beside her. Staggering out into the den where I was reading, he sat down beside me and closed his eyes again. After his fourth nap of the day our four-year-old told him he had a napping problem. We laughed and told her daddy was just really enjoying sabbath.

Sometimes we need to nap. I think God loves a good nap. But most of the time we don't let ourselves. Have you ever seen a young child fall asleep in a public place? Napping at a waterpark or with their head in their parents' lap at church? Limp in the arms of a loving parent. Children nap anywhere because they trust their parents to watch over them and protect them. Will you allow God to watch over your rest? You are safe in his loving arms.

Reading Question: The psalmist reminds us that God's desire is to fill us with peace to hold us in safety. Are you relying on God for peace, rest and security in your life?

Try This: Take a nap today.

Rest: Day 11 – Ezekiel 20: 11-12, 16-20

¹I gave them my decrees and made known to them my laws, by which the person who obeys them will live. ¹²Also I gave them my Sabbaths as a sign between us, so they would know that I the LORD made them holy.

¹⁶because they rejected my laws and did not follow my decrees and desecrated my Sabbaths. For their hearts were devoted to their idols. ¹⁷Yet I looked on them with pity and did not destroy them or put an end to them in the wilderness. ¹⁸I said to their children in the wilderness, “Do not follow the statutes of your parents or keep their laws or defile yourselves with their idols. ¹⁹I am the LORD your God; follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. ²⁰Keep my Sabbaths holy, that they may be a sign between us. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.”

My four-year-old has recently become obsessed with orca whales. She loves finding out facts about them with one parent and then repeating them to the other parent, and anyone else who will listen. The other day she told me orcas sleep with one eye open and only half their brain at rest. Then they switch to the other eye and rest the other half of their brain. I didn't verify this, so I have no idea if it is true or not, but my initial reaction was sadness for the whale (which is technically not a whale, it's a dolphin, and a highly intelligent creature—I've learned so much). “How sad,” I thought, that some part of them is always on. That they only get a partial, never a full, rest.

Rest is a gift. One that was meant to set us apart as holy, belonging to God. In the Old Testament, sabbath is as much a sign of the covenant as circumcision, but we've forgotten both the symbolism and its value. Christianity has absorbed the Enlightenment value of progress and largely conveys to its practitioners a try harder, do more attitude towards holiness. What I love about this passage is the pity God has towards us. Like me and killer whales, “do they have any idea what they are missing? And for what? Idols?” Sabbath is what was meant to make us holy. Perhaps doing more nothing is more effective sometimes than something.

Reading Question: What does it mean that sabbath is meant to be a sign between God and the Israelites?

Try This: What would it look like to spend a day without doing anything that is “work”? No work, school work, laundry, cooking (if that is work for you), grocery shopping, errands, or anything else. Plan ahead and prepare to have one day this week without any of those things.

Rest: Day 12: Mark 2:27-28

²⁷ Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. ²⁸ So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

My favorite place in the whole world is a cabin in the mountains of Lake Tahoe. It belongs to my family and backs up to woods full of sugar pines and granite boulders. When we manage to pull ourselves away from life and ministry back home and head up to this place, it rejuvenates my soul. Sabbath is meant to do that also. Sabbath is about stopping and resting from our work and our forgetfulness towards God. To reengage in that most important relationship, we sometimes neglect. But sabbath is also about delight. In rest we find peace and joy in a life that is full of the blessings God gives us. Just as spending time in Tahoe reminds me of the incredible blessing of my family, of time off, of the beauty of God's creation, sabbath reminds me of the blessings here at home that are easy to otherwise overlook and find joy in them again.

Another way to think about sabbath is 24 hours set aside to do only what brings life and joy, delight for your soul. What could you do for 24 hours that brings joy? Making sourdough bread, drinking a good bottle of wine, hiking with your family or friends? Cuddling on the couch with a novel and a cup of tea? Celebrating all that is good and beautiful and true.

What is it for you?

Reading Question: What does it mean that sabbath was made for man not man for the sabbath? Do you think that sabbath is still part of God's invitation and command for us today?

Try This: Do something today that brings you joy and delight in God. Go for a walk by yourself, read a book of fiction, paint, cook. Pick something from your life-giving list and do it with God.

Rest: Day 13 – Isaiah 58:13-14

“If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath
and from doing as you please on my holy day,
if you call the Sabbath a delight
and the LORD’s holy day honorable,
and if you honor it by not going your own way
and not doing as you please or speaking idle words,
¹⁴ then you will find your joy in the LORD,
and I will cause you to ride in triumph on the heights of the land
and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob.”
For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Sometimes we joke in my family that sabbath is like Christmas morning once a week. We look forward to it. We get excited as we pick up the kids from daycare, frantically clean the house and do anything that can’t wait 24 hours—laundry, grocery shop, water plants. We rush around in anticipation of the day that we delight in. To delight is to experience great joy or pleasure. It’s not a word we use much today but it’s what Isaiah prophesies the sabbath is meant to be called. A day of delight.

What do you delight in? What brings you joy and pleasure? Is it your kids? A hobby you love? Is it nature, or running, or your pets, or learning? Most people delight in what they are good at or what they love. Sabbath is both those things for us. We have gotten good at truly resting in the best sort of way on the sabbath. We also love it and prioritize it. And for us, it brings real joy. Joy in the goodness of God. And it is joy that lasts. Even when things have been hard. Like when California went into lockdown during the Coronavirus Pandemic and the kids no longer had daycare but I still had a full-time job. Or when we put so much hoping into an outcome that didn’t pan out the way we wanted. Or when my chronic illness again began to encroach on our life and the routines we had created. I know my life is overwhelmingly good and blessed, but I think the joy that comes from finding our delight in Jesus is strong enough to overcome far worse than I have had to deal with.

If we want to cultivate joy, one of those Fruit of the Spirit, in times both good and bad, we have to learn to find our delight in Jesus. Perhaps sabbath isn’t the only way, but it’s one way to start to do that.

Reading Question: Would you describe yourself as a person of joy? How might sabbath help you find delight and joy in Jesus?

Try This: Write on your hand or on a notecard in your pocket “Thank you God” and carry it around all day. Whenever you see it or remember it is there, thank God for that moment. Thank God for small joys. Thank God that you are alive and blessed and find delight in Him.

Rest: Day 14 – Psalm 23 (ESV)

¹ The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters,

³ He restores my soul.

He leads me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk through the valley of the
shadow of death,

I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;

your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
forever.

So far, we've talked a lot about physical rest, which is so important. We are not simply spiritual beings, we are embodied. And our bodies and spirits are way more connected than we want to admit. But the practice of rest is also about our inner selves. To rest in our souls requires deep abiding trust in God. This passage verbalizes that dependence on God. It also reminds us of God's faithfulness towards us. We have reason to let God shepherd our lives—he leads us well—providing for our needs and our security.

As a pastor I can't tell you the number of times I've heard this passage read out at funerals. As I've said goodbye to pillars and saints in the church, I am reminded each time of the importance of living for our eulogy not our resume'.⁴ Our resume' is likely full of degrees and skills. It lists the jobs we've had, awards received. But when we die, the good memorials are the ones where the focus is not on the persons' accomplishments, but rather their loves. The way they loved their students. The way they took time to notice others. Their family—the memories of vacations and happy moments.

We spend so much of our lives seeking accolades and accomplishments, but real meaning, real wholeness in our soul is found in living for others, and living out of a deep abiding trust in God. When we strive after Christ everything else seems to fall in place also. Because when the Lord is our shepherd, we are well guided indeed. Let's rest in that today.

Reading Question: Inner rest is found in letting God guide and lead us. How are you doing at relying on God over yourself?

Try This: Pray this passage as a prayer. Invite God to become more of a shepherd over your life. Ask God to fill your heart with trust in his good guidance.

⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/12/opinion/sunday/david-brooks-the-moral-bucket-list.html>

Rest: Day 15—Hebrews 4:1,9-11

4 Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it...⁹ There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; ¹⁰ for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his. ¹¹ Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience.

The motto, in many ways, in our culture is "Life's tough, then you die." We know that the world is unjust. That people are hurting, but if this is all there is, then we better make the most of it. Have as much pleasure as we can. Do what makes us happy because there is no bigger purpose or larger meaning—then we die. But scripture puts forward an alternative to this hedonistic-fatalistic outlook. This passage speaks of a promise of rest, a sabbath-rest, an ultimate rest, for the people of God. It is an image of comfort and peace. We have hope in a life after death, resting with our Lord. Most of us are bad with death. We fear dying. We are awkward around people in grief. The unknown is terrifying so we try not to think about it. But what if death is what scripture says, resting with our Lord? That doesn't sound so bad. After the busyness and stress of this life, maybe that sounds welcome. Death is not an end but rather an end to the troubles of life and a new life full of rest with Jesus.

But how does one enter this promised land? I think by making every effort to enter it now. Seeking to glimpse moments of Jesus' kingdom here and now. Just the other day One of my daughters woke up early from her nap and she asked if she could help me with what I was doing. I was making soup for dinner. So she helped me pick some veggies from our garden and she sat on a stool next to the stove and lifted the lid on the pot every time I finished chopping something else to put inside. It was a moment of quiet peaceful perfection. And afterwards I thought about how someday, hopefully, she will make a similar dish, perhaps long after I'm gone and be reminded of that perfect moment together and how I taught her how to cook when she was only four years old.

When we know who to credit with the good in our life. When we savor the sweetness of each little blessing. When we live fully in the moment and peace in our souls, at rest in who we are and whose we are, then we find rest, not just in life, but for eternity.

Reading Question: What do you think of when you think of death? Do you imagine rest with God? How would this image change the way you view and respond when loved one's pass?

Try This: In quiet ask God to show you a time when you were truly at rest with Him. Reflect on that moment and how cultivating that peace might change the way you live and even the way you die.

Rest: Day 16 - Jeremiah 6:16

¹⁶This is what the LORD says:

“Stand at the crossroads and look;
ask for the ancient paths,
ask where the good way is, and walk in it,
and you will find rest for your souls.
But you said, ‘We will not walk in it.’

Somewhere along the way we decided that new is always better than old. We want the latest fad, the latest technology, the new hip idea. Companies like Apple have capitalized on this, selling 100s of millions of phones each year a new one is released, because it has one small change we just can't live without. The problem with this model in our faith is that God is old. I think about this when I am writing sermons. It doesn't matter how creative or inspired I might think I am, someone somewhere, has most definitely preached this angle before. Faith in Jesus Christ is not new and how to live out that faith is not new either. Things like slowing down, practicing the presence of God, rest are ideas that are pertinent to our own cultural moment but have been part of the church for thousands of years.

Sabbath is definitely an old, many would say, outdated religious idea. But what if it's not? What if it's the thing that could set what's wrong in us right? Maybe something old, is better than something new. I know rest is better than the pace of so many of our lives. How can we learn to look to the past for answers instead of rejecting the wisdom of our forefathers?

Rest was built into the rhythm of time from the beginning of Genesis. And it changed the way the people of God have lived since then. The Hebrew day did not begin in the morning the way we think of a day. It began in the evening. This is why in the creation story it says “and there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.”⁵ This pattern of time reflects the grace of God. Rather than starting our day with waking and working we are meant to begin with rest. While we sleep the world and God don't stop. We wake up to the reality that many of the important things began hours ago, without us, and we aren't really beginning but joining in the creative endeavor. I recently heard on the radio a story about how people who get good sleep have less chance of getting Alzheimer's because the brain rebuilds itself while we sleep!

Yet, we think the ways of the past are backwards? Maybe we are the ones who are wrong. Maybe not in all things, but in this. Sleep is good. We can begin our day with grace. And the practices of the church we have forgotten, are worth discovering again. Let's walk in the good way. Let's find the rest for our souls God promises.

Reaching Question: How do you accept or reject the wisdom of your ancestors? Is there something old that you might embrace that would help you reconnect with something you've lost?

⁵ Genesis 1:5

Try This: Technology at its worst is opposed to rest. Fast or sabbath from all technology one day this week and reflect on how much slower and more restful your day becomes.

Rest: Day 17 - Nehemiah 13:15-22

¹⁵ In those days I saw people in Judah treading winepresses on the Sabbath and bringing in grain and loading it on donkeys, together with wine, grapes, figs and all other kinds of loads. And they were bringing all this into Jerusalem on the Sabbath. Therefore I warned them against selling food on that day. ¹⁶ People from Tyre who lived in Jerusalem were bringing in fish and all kinds of merchandise and selling them in Jerusalem on the Sabbath to the people of Judah. ¹⁷ I rebuked the nobles of Judah and said to them, "What is this wicked thing you are doing—desecrating the Sabbath day? ¹⁸ Didn't your ancestors do the same things, so that our God brought all this calamity on us and on this city? Now you are stirring up more wrath against Israel by desecrating the Sabbath."

¹⁹ When evening shadows fell on the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath, I ordered the doors to be shut and not opened until the Sabbath was over. I stationed some of my own men at the gates so that no load could be brought in on the Sabbath day. ²⁰ Once or twice the merchants and sellers of all kinds of goods spent the night outside Jerusalem. ²¹ But I warned them and said, "Why do you spend the night by the wall? If you do this again, I will arrest you." From that time on they no longer came on the Sabbath. ²² Then I commanded the Levites to purify themselves and go and guard the gates in order to keep the Sabbath day holy.

Remember me for this also, my God, and show mercy to me according to your great love.

What if, one day a week we didn't buy anything? That doesn't sound so hard until you realize you are out of milk, or it's Christmas season and you still haven't gotten a present for your nieces or whatever it is. The reality is so much harder than the idea. That's because we live in a culture of instant gratification. We want the answer, we ask google. We want to make a new recipe for dinner, we walk a block, or drive five minutes to a grocery store. Oops we ran out of toilet paper, Amazon prime! The idea of waiting for what we want is a hard concept, Israel struggled with it too! Nehemiah had to install guards at the gate to keep the merchants out and the Sabbath holy.

It's not that there is anything wrong with buying what we need, but focusing on our wants distracts us from God. In our family we don't purchase things on the Sabbath because then we are focused on what we don't have instead of the bounty we do have. Instead, we focus on our blessings, which are so much more than we deserve.

Today is the day before Thanksgiving and yes, it's a weird Thanksgiving (in 2020) but I also can't stop thinking of all the ways God has blessed my family. In my time of quiet with God this morning I couldn't stop singing the old hymn *Great is Thy Faithfulness*.

Morning by morning, new mercies I see.
All I have needed thy hand hath provided.
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord unto me.

What if today you focused less on what you want or need and more on what you have? There is holiness in contentment. Let us find contentment in Jesus Christ.

Reading Question: How have you bought into the instant gratification culture? How do you think you would react to being told you can't buy anything one day a week?

Try This: On your Sabbath or one day this week don't buy or shop for anything. Not online or in a store. Every time you reach for your phone or think of something you need to get, offer a prayer of thanksgiving for all that you have instead.

Rest: Day 18 - Psalm 92

A psalm. A song. For the Sabbath day.

- ¹ It is good to praise the LORD
and make music to your name, O Most High,
² proclaiming your love in the morning
and your faithfulness at night,
³ to the music of the ten-stringed lyre
and the melody of the harp.
⁴ For you make me glad by your deeds, LORD;
I sing for joy at what your hands have done.
⁵ How great are your works, LORD,
how profound your thoughts!
⁶ Senseless people do not know,
fools do not understand,
⁷ that though the wicked spring up like grass
and all evildoers flourish,
they will be destroyed forever.
⁸ But you, LORD, are forever exalted.
⁹ For surely your enemies, LORD,
surely your enemies will perish;
all evildoers will be scattered.
¹⁰ You have exalted my horn like that of a wild
ox;
fine oils have been poured on me.
¹¹ My eyes have seen the defeat of my
adversaries;
my ears have heard the rout of my wicked
foes.
¹² The righteous will flourish like a palm tree,
they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon;
¹³ planted in the house of the LORD,
they will flourish in the courts of our God.
¹⁴ They will still bear fruit in old age,
they will stay fresh and green,
¹⁵ proclaiming, "The LORD is upright;
he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in
him."

I've always cared entirely too much about what others think of me. A people pleaser, a perfectionist, a fake. At some point I've been called all of those and more. And although I still see the orientation towards that desire to be liked and useful in myself, I have also changed at my core. Last week I was leading a small group of freshmen and sophomores when we read the part in 2 Samuel of David dancing shamelessly before the Lord and being scolded as foolish by his wife Michal. All the girls understood Michal's critique. "That's not how kings should act. They are supposed to do what their subjects want and be kingly," one said. "He was probably just doing it to get attention," another chimed in. "That's what Michal thought," I said, "and probably some of the people watching too, but David said why he did it, he was celebrating God⁶. He was willing to look foolish and undignified in praise to Him." To my overly self-conscious students this was a nearly impossible concept, and personally I get their struggle. But I also understand David more than I ever did before. Practicing Sabbath has altered the way I live in the world. On Sabbath, I find joy and delight in my long unhurried time with God, so much so that all I want to do is praise and worship Him. I long for the Sabbath and I long to sit and do nothing but be with the God I love. I am filled with so much love for him that I am willing to be unbridled and ridiculous before everyone else. For God is the one who fills me up, not them. No one and nothing else give me as much joy and hope and life.

Reading Question: Do you shout out your joy in God, or do you hide your devotion out of fear of what others might think?

Try This: Read through this Psalm first for understanding. Read it again for a word or phrase to strike you and spend time meditating on that phrase. Then read it again as a prayer to God. Finally read it with the intent to hear what God is calling you to do in rest today.

⁶ 2 Samuel 6:21

Rest: Day 19 - Psalm 131:2

But I have calmed and quieted myself,
I am like a weaned child with its mother;
like a weaned child I am content.

Human babies are completely helpless. Other species have offspring that can talk within a few hours or fend for themselves almost immediately. But humans require a lot of care from others, for a long time! That's why I have such a hard time imagining Jesus as a baby—to see God who created the universe dependent on his mother for food and everything else. But as hard as it is to fathom, this is, yet another, image of God's grace. If God did that, experienced being a powerless, helpless child, suffering through the terrible-twos even puberty to be with us, shouldn't we be able to, even for a few moments rest completely in his embrace?

My youngest daughter Hope was bad at nursing. She suffered from silent reflux and perhaps that's why, to this day, she eats like a sloth. Middle of the night feedings were a slow, painful, tear-filled process. I couldn't put her down even after she finally finished because then she would cry from the pain of her body wanting to bring the milk back up (sorry, too graphic?). So, I had to hold her for a while, both of us dozing off in our rocking chair. Some people asked why I didn't switch her to a bottle or change something when we were clearly struggling so much? But for me, that moment when we both, out of exhaustion and contentment, laid there in the dark and quiet, was worth it.

So many of us carry the weight of the world, or at least our small corner of it, on our shoulders. But what if we rested in the arms of our Lord the way a baby rests after nursing at her mother's breast? Trust, contentment, fullness, exhaustion, quiet. May we lay down our lives like that in the arms of God.

Reading Question: What words come to mind when you contemplate resting on God in the image of this Psalm?

Try This: As we near the end of this month focused on rest, spend time in quiet with God reflecting back on how you have been changed over the past month. How have you become more trusting of Jesus? How have you felt more settled in your soul?

Rest: Day 20 - Psalm 116:7

Return to your rest, my soul,
for the LORD has been good to you.

There are different kinds of restlessness in our soul. There is the restlessness of anxiety, like waiting for test results or waiting for the results of the 2020 presidential election. There is the anxiety of not knowing what will happen next and the doubt of being strong enough to handle it. That type of restlessness is normal and yet unfounded. When we spiral into those moments of fear we can, like the psalmist, remind ourselves of God's ever faithfulness towards us. We can remember all the ways God has been good to us, we have no reason to doubt him now. He who is faithful will continue to be faithful.

But there is another form of restlessness of soul. The restlessness of knowing what the Spirit is calling us to do and yet hesitating. Out of fear or uncertainty we waiver. In our heart we know what is right or good or meant for us. And so, our soul is disquiet within us. And we cannot shake it. We are being pursued by God and will be restless until we relent from our stubbornness and follow the Spirit's leading.

The question is, how can you tell the difference between the two? Perhaps time, perhaps quiet, perhaps prayer. However, both kinds of restlessness can become a moment for faithfulness and growth. In a moment in my own life where I was feeling a large dose of both, my spiritual director suggested changing fear in my mind to curiosity. I said I was nervous about the future, she said, "aren't you curious to see what God will do down the road?" I said I was afraid of stepping out into the unknown I felt God was leading me into, she said, "aren't you curious to see what God is going to do with your faithfulness?" Sometimes we need a change in perspective.

God is good. Aren't curious to see what our good God will do next?

Reading Question: How has God been good to you? Reflect on the blessing in your life at this moment.

Try This: When you find yourself feeling anxious or disquiet, stop and invite God to give you rest. Tell yourself that you aren't afraid, you are curious to see how God will continue to be faithful in this and all moments.

