

“Rest Matters”
Genesis 1:31-2:3
July 2, 2017

I have a confession to make. I'm bad at resting...but I've got to admit... I'm WORKING on it! I know that rest matters. That's why we need sermons on this topic. When my family heard what I was going to be preaching on this morning, they gave each other a look like “Whaaat? Dad, preaching on rest!? You've gotta be kidding me!” None of us operates well in a continual state of exhaustion. When we allow ourselves to be continually depleted, we are ignoring God's good plan for rest. And, frankly, nobody likes a grump!¹

Getting enough rest really matters but we live in a 24/7 world. Back in my Youth Pastor days, I was given the book, “Crazy Busy,” by Kevin Deyoung. I started reading it a few years ago. But... I never finished. Can you guess why? ...Yeah, I've just been too busy. In Kevin's book, he lists 3 Dangers of Busyness:²

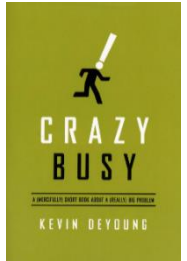
1. Busyness can ruin our joy. “When our lives are frantic and frenzied, we are more prone to anxiety, resentment, impatience, and irritability.”
2. Busyness can rob our hearts. This is why Christian conferences and summer camps are so good for our spiritual growth. “[Y]ou have to clear your schedule to do them...You set aside your normal insanity for a weekend [or a week] and find space to think, pray, and worship.”
3. Busyness can cover up the rot in our souls. “The greatest danger with busyness is that there may be greater dangers you never have time to consider. Busyness does not [necessarily] mean you are a faithful or fruitful Christian. It only means you are busy...”

So, how about you: Are you busy? If you are, I'm glad you are reading this sermon. Today's sermon is going to add one more thing to your busy list of things to do. Here it is... REST! Take a break. Stop all the work for a little while.

1. Our Creator designed consistent rest for His creation. For example, in Exodus 20:9-10 the Nation of Israel was told, “Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 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.” There is a divine provision here by our Creator for the Nation of Israel. It's meant for the good of people who work, but also even for the animals who work. Physical bodies need rest. And so do our minds and emotions. We need to sit still for a while each week, pause from our labors. This design has a particular math formula to it: 1 in every 7.³ It's intended to be consistent. So not work 30 or 60 straight days and then take a week of vacation. Every 7 days should include one day of rest.

Exodus 16 records God's remarkable provision of Manna and Quail. Each evening they had meat and each morning they had bread; it was lying right there on the ground. They just had to go out and pick it up, then take it home and prepare it...except for on the 7th day, the Sabbath. God provided a double portion on the 6th day and made sure that it didn't spoil overnight, so that there would be enough food leftover for them on the 7th day. God provided enough resources for them to be able to take a day off each week. A modern-day application could be that we learn to use whatever we've earned in 6 days to provide for our needs in 7 days. This way we always have a day when we don't need to work each week. Put another way, living within our means should include allowing ourselves a day off every week.

Now, interestingly enough, Exodus 16:4 tells us that God provided a double food portion on the 6th day to test them and to see if they would follow His instructions. In Exodus 16:27-30 we learn that, “Nevertheless, some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather it, but they found none.



¹ This busyness often means that our friends and family get the leftovers. We've been running on fumes all week long and by the time we get done with all our work, we don't have anything left to give. Then we feel guilty. Oofa, something has got to change!

² Kevin Deyoung, *Crazy Busy*, Crossway, Wheaton, IL, 2013, pp. 26-32.

³ Beyond this design of 1 in 7, God also built in holidays/feasts that required rest, eating, and NOT working. Much of this tied into times for worship and prayer, but they also, always included rest.

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.” Keep in mind, this all happened BEFORE the Sabbath officially became one of the 10 commandments. We’ll come back to this... What’s intriguing here is that they weren’t told to spend the whole day at the tabernacle. They were told to rest! God says, “Bear in mind that the LORD has given you the Sabbath.” God has given us rest as one of His gifts for His people. Rest is about trusting God; receive what He provides and then learn to live contently with that.

This makes me think of Matthew 6:26, 31-33, “Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ...So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well...” Now, some of us may be a little skeptical about this, “So, I’m just supposed to wait around and trust God to dump food on me out of thin air like a bird? Sounds like a good way to go hungry to me!” Well, no, not exactly. God has given us 6 days to work. But once we’ve done what we can to make a living, God calls us to trust Him rather than worrying or constantly running after more and more every day of the week. It can be hard to trust God when things get tight financially. But God calls us to rest in His faithful provision. Why not CONSISTENTLY, take a day off every week and choose not to work? It’s important for us to recognize that...

2. Our Creator modeled rest from the very beginning. Even as God was creating animals/men/women, God knew that we would need regular periods of rest. So, He set us an example. Genesis 2:2-3 says, “By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. 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.” Why would God need to rest from His work? Was God tired? I don’t think so. Isaiah 40:28 tells us, “Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary....” Our Creator was not tired, He was modeling rest for us.

The *NIV Study Bible* note mentions that the Hebrew verb “rested” in Genesis 2:2 is the origin of the word “Sabbath.”⁴ Therefore, while eventually the Sabbath became something that was mandated as part of the covenant between God and the nation of Israel, we find it modeled at the beginning of creation. We find evidence in Genesis that rest is a creation principle, not just a Jewish principle. I mentioned earlier that we would come back to this. The significance that God gives to sabbath rest, is something that predates the 10 commandments and the Nation of Israel. This is intriguing.

Now, just to be clear, I am not suggesting that the Bible intends for modern-day Christ-followers to practice OT law by observing a strict Sabbath every Saturday. Colossians 2:16-17 makes it pretty clear, “Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. 17 These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.”⁵ We are no longer under the Old Testament command to observe a particular Sabbath day. However, it is still wise for us to recognize God’s initial design for rest. All of God’s commandments were designed for humankind’s benefit and blessing. They are there to protect us.⁶

God did not design the Sabbath for the sake of the Sabbath. He designed the Sabbath for the sake of people, whom He created, loves, and cares for. He created it for His beloved creation, for the blessing they would receive by practicing it. Mark 2:23-27 says, “One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. 24 The Pharisees said to him, “Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?” 25 He

⁴ In fact, Exodus 20:11 quotes the 1st half of Genesis 2:3 but replaces the word “seventh” with “Sabbath.” See *NIV Study Bible 2011*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, p. 12.

⁵ See also Hebrews 3:7–4:13.

⁶ Consider Deuteronomy 6:24, 10:12-13, Romans 15:4, and 1 John 5:3.

answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? 26 In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions." 27 Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."

The Pharisees were very upset about the disciples "harvesting" on the Sabbath. But, they were missing the point. They were so caught up in the legalism of judging the behavior of others, that they were missing this incredible gift from God. The Sabbath was never meant to be a burden to people, where we stress out about the minutia of what counts as work and what doesn't. It was meant to be a day for lifting off our burdens of work, a day of rest and recovery from the labors of life. And it also provided the opportunity for extended times of worship and fellowship.

This morning, let's be sure that we don't get caught up in divisive arguments over the Sabbath. Romans 14:5 gives this helpful perspective, "One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind." So, there may be some who feel strongly that we should continue to practice the Sabbath every Saturday. There may be others who feel the Sabbath was moved to Sundays due to the resurrection of Christ.

Still others may consider every day alike. Frankly, this is not our focus this morning. If you are interested in studying the Sabbath issue more in-depth, I urge you to contact our church for a copy of an article called "The Sabbath Question," by Pastor Fred Martin.

What I am suggesting this morning is that we should pay attention to this teaching in Scripture regarding God's design for people to rest. Rest matters. It is important in the lives of modern-day Christ-followers. This is true for the reasons we've already talked about. But, also because of Jesus' example. Mark 1:21-37 tells us about a very busy day in Jesus' life. It's a Saturday morning that seems to begin in a fairly normal way. Jesus heads to the synagogue and begins to teach. He proceeds to cast a demon him out of a man. After leaving the synagogue, he goes to Simon's house where he heals his mother-in-law of a fever. After sunset, this same day, Mark 1:32-34 says, "That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons..."

This was NOT a very restful Sabbath for Jesus. But what I want us to notice is what happens that same night. Mark 1:35-37 tells us that, "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. 36 Simon and his companions went to look for him, 37 and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!" Jesus, who was fully human, recognized His need for time alone with God, for spiritual rest and refreshment. He needed to find time to get away from all the pressures of His earthly work. Every Christ-follower needs to protect time for solitary spiritual renewal. Spiritual rest is just as important as physical rest. There's a wonderful passage in Matthew 11:28-29 where Jesus says, "Come to me, all you 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." Spend some time with Jesus today and find rest for your soul. Some of us may need physical rest, some may need spiritual rest, still others may need emotional or mental rest. Whatever the case may be, Christ-followers are urged to set aside time for rest. Bemidji, MN is the best place to be on the planet in July. It's a wonderful time to get out in creation and connect with God. Why not do that this week?

There used to be a time in our society when just about everything was closed on Sundays. Do you remember that? Back in the day, there were very few places that stayed open on Sundays. If you needed groceries or gas, you just waited until Monday or planned ahead to buy it on Saturday. Sure, it was a bit of an inconvenience but it provided this wonderful break in the midst of everybody's busy week. Our world has changed. As consumers, we like immediate access and customer service 24/7. Unfortunately, that has contributed to a society where many of us are not getting the consistent rest that we need.

Consider this article from the New York Times:⁷ It's entitled, "SUNDAY SHOPPING: A WAY OF LIFE FOR MILLIONS." "[In 1976] the big New York department stores began a hotly debated policy of opening on Sundays. Within weeks, they were joined by thousands of smaller retailers in the city and region, many of them reluctant but swept up by competitive pressures. Since then, weekend life in New York and its suburbs has never been quite the same. For many working couples, single people and family groups, Sundays have become a day to combine shopping, eating out and entertainment... "With the opening of stores on Sunday, shopping has become both functional and recreational," said Judith Langer, who operates her own marketing research company in New York... Similar changes are being felt throughout the region and indeed in most parts of the nation. Like New York, many other states in recent years have struck down legal restrictions that prohibited the sale of most goods on Sundays. The curbs, called blue laws, date from colonial New England, with the observance of the Sabbath being their main purpose."

Now, I'm not necessarily suggesting that we go back to these old laws.⁸ I'm not suggesting that we legislate when someone can work or when someone has to rest. Let's avoid any judgmental attitudes toward how others choose to use their time. I am asking us to recognize that our society continues to shift away from rest and stillness. We seem to be losing the value of sitting still and not "getting anything done" for a while. I'm saying that we should embrace God's good plan for rest. Rest matters for us as humans. This is part of God's good design. Are you working too hard? If so, here are 3 suggestions for REST:

1. Be willing to let others rest. If you know that it's someone's day off, don't interrupt their rest with some work item that can wait. If you own or manage a business, make sure that you allow your employees ample opportunity to get adequate rest. Schedule life in such a way that it supports other people's need for rest.

2. Schedule time during your vacation to rest. Now, this may sound silly at first but most of you already know what I'm talking about. If you are like me, sometimes I pack my vacation so full of home projects and fun adventures that I don't take any time to just be still. To sit and think or read a good book. We often come back from vacation more exhausted than when we left!

3. Embrace a Weekly Sabbath Lifestyle: choose a consistent 24-hour period when you don't work. Design those 24 hours to be restful: physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually restful. Refill your tanks. Refresh your soul. Let some form of recreation, "re-create" you. If you can't do 24 hours, then do 16 or do 12. Do something! Rest matters. We need to do it. Rest for God's glory. Rest for the sake of the people around you. Rest for your own sanity. Rest matters!

This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji
on July 2, 2017 by Pastor Jerry R. A. Johnson.

⁷ *New York Times* article by Isadore Barmash, published: October 19, 1986.

⁸ Several years ago, stores began opening on Thanksgiving Day. It's a trend that I was very sad to see. It's challenging enough getting our friends/family together over the holidays. Now, some store policies are forcing people to take work shifts when it seems they ought to be home resting and enjoying time with friends/family. Let's be careful here. Stores can do what they want to do. We understand it's very competitive out there. And, people can do what they want to do. If they want to shop on Thanksgiving, so be it.