

Labor Day

Exodus 20:8-11

How are you today? Like, really how are you? I wish I had time to sit down with each of you to ask you that question and actually listen to your response. I bet if I did, and you were willing to be honest with me, maybe even a little vulnerable, you'd say something like this, "I'm exhausted." Anyone?

Low-grade exhaustion seems to be the new norm for us. I talk to people all the time who are physically exhausted. We don't get enough sleep or down time to recharge. We're living at a pace that's nearly impossible to maintain. We're pushing into our margins and withdrawing from our reserves.

We're emotionally tired from carrying the weight of worries and stress and anxieties. Our hearts are heavy from the news of hurricanes and droughts and floods. Ongoing wars and injustices happening around the world.

We're mentally tired. Our minds never stop racing. We're always thinking about what's next and what we have to do. We sit down at Church and the notes we take aren't about the sermon, they're about our calendar and to-do lists. Our minds are constantly in-tune with our devices, and the dinging or buzzing of our phones. We have thoughts that keep us up at night, which just makes us even more physically tired.

And the cycle goes on and on and on until many of us start to feel like my buddy, Brian, over here. You're running and running and running, but you don't feel like you're getting anywhere. You're exhausted, but you feel stuck on this treadmill of life that just keeps going.

And then, some jerk like me comes along and says, "You know what you need to do? Run faster! If you really want to amount to anything, you've got to pick up the pace! If you want a better life, you need to go harder. Do more to be more! You're never going to get anywhere unless you push yourself to the limits!" And so, you crank up the speed and increase the effort, trying to catch up to where you feel like everyone else is.

Or, you give someone else control of your life and pace. You want to impress them, or fit in, or not let them down, and so you let them control how fast and how hard you run.

The truth is, everything in our life and culture is shouting "Go! Go! Go!" Go faster! Do more! Try harder! And all the while, God is inviting you to STOP. To pause, take a breath, and be still.

Let's give a hand to Brian! (Share story behind illustration.)

The point is, while the world is saying "Go stronger, faster harder..." and calling it normal, God is saying, "Stop." Take time to pause, breathe, and just be still.

This weekend, our nation celebrates Labor Day. It's a day each year when we recognize the contributions of the laborer, and our government generously says, "Here. Take this one day to rest from your work." God's like, "Oh, that's nice that they give you one day a year. I want to give you one day a week!" The word is Sabbath, and **the Sabbath is God's invitation to stop running and rest in Him.**

If you have a Bible, or a Bible app you like to use, turn with me to Exodus 20. Context:

- Israel just came out of Egyptian slavery.
- Make bricks. Make more bricks. Make them faster.
- Every day, grueling labor. That was their identity. Brick makers.

So, when God is establishing Israel as His people, His chosen nation, He wants to give them a new identity. And, it's an identity that's not rooted in what they do, but who they are. They are dearly loved children of God. And, in Exodus 20, He gives them 10 Commandments that will help them live out this new identity. And the fourth one in God's Top 10 List is this **...(READ Ex. 20:8-11)**

The word "Sabbath," or "Shabbat," means to cease or rest. It can even mean to desist, which has a little more of a defiance to it. So, on the seventh day of each week, the Israelites were to stop from their work and rest. The command actually tells them to "keep it holy," which means to set it apart for God. It's a day to remember and celebrate all that God has done and to enjoy His creation, just like He did.

And this is so important to God that, for some context, the commands that come AFTER this one are things like, "Don't murder." "Don't commit adultery."

But, as important as this command is, I think there's something so beautiful behind what it means. You see, in Egypt, Pharaoh had made himself Israel's god. He ruled over them and he was demanding, overbearing, and cruel. He defined their worth by their production and that brought with it anxiety, fear, and worry. He literally worked them to death and didn't bat an eye.

So, in this command, God is saying, "Listen, I'm different, so things will be better for you." Sabbath was a gift of mercy and grace for God's people. It was an invitation to put down the hammers and stop the work. Sabbath is God's invitation to stop running and rest in Him.

Not, rest because the work is done. If we wait for the work to be done until we rest, we'll never Sabbath because the work will never be done. There will always be more to do. Sabbath is an invitation to trust God with your unfinished work and be reminded that you're more valuable than the bricks you produce. Whatever those bricks look like.

So, in this way, the **Sabbath is not just rest that refreshes the body, it's rest that restores the soul.** It restores God's image in us and our identity in Him, not in what we do. Sabbath is God's invitation to stop running and rest in Him. Physically rest, emotionally rest, spiritually rest. That is the gift and the blessing of Sabbath. At least, that's what it was intended to be.

Unfortunately, though, through the years, some religious people came in and messed things up. They started putting a bunch of rules around the Sabbath and completely distorted God's purpose for it. Sabbath became a Law to keep instead of a day to enjoy. It was an obligation more than an invitation. It got to the point where, doing anything that even resembled work was considered unlawful and a sin.

When I was in Israel this past Spring, I got to experience how far some people still go to keep the letter of this Law while missing the heart of it. It was a Saturday, which is the Jewish Sabbath. My hotel room was on the 12th floor and I was heading down for breakfast on the 1st floor. There were four elevators, I pushed the Down button and hopped on the first one that opened. I pushed the button for the 1st floor and noticed it didn't light up, but the door closed and the elevator started going down.

It stopped at the 11th floor, the doors opened, but no one was there. I waited, the doors closed, and it started going down again. It stopped at the 10th floor. Same thing. Doors opened, no one was there, they closed and started going down. 9th floor.

Finally, on the 9th floor, someone got on. It did the same thing on the 8th floor and the person goes, "Oh, this is the Sabbath elevator." I was like, "The 'what' elevator?" She said, "The Sabbath elevator. The other ones run normally, but this one stops at every floor on the Sabbath so that no one has to work by pushing a button." I was like, "Are you kidding me! Of course this would be the one that I get on."

And just as I was about to hop off with her on the 8th floor to catch a quicker ride to breakfast, I felt the Spirit gently say, "Why are you in such a hurry? Stay." So, I stayed, and I made my way to breakfast one floor at a time.

But I saw the real beauty of the Sabbath in that elevator. It wasn't in the ridiculousness of not pushing a button and doing any work. It was in the rest. The slower pace. It was in taking time to not be in a hurry and enjoy the journey, not just rush to get to the destination. In that elevator, I learned what Jesus meant in [Mark 2:27. He says...\(READ\)](#)

The Sabbath is a gift to be enjoyed, not a law to be kept. So, how can we keep the Sabbath and make it holy, without turning it into some kind of religious obligation that God never meant for it to be? Two principles to keep in mind. First, [Have the courage to say, "Enough!"](#)

It takes courage to practice the Sabbath because it requires saying, "Enough!" I'm not going to run anymore. I'm not going to accept this low-grade exhaustion as normal! In his book, *Sabbath as Resistance*, Walter Brueggemann says, ["In our own contemporary context of the rat race of anxiety, the celebration of Sabbath is an act of resistance. It is a visible insistence that our lives are not defined by the production and consumption of goods."](#)

In a very real sense, practicing Sabbath is standing in resistance to what our culture says is normal and the pressure it puts on us to live at an unsustainable pace of life. So, if you want to accept God's invitation to stop running and find rest in Him, you've got to have the courage to say, "Enough!"

Second, you've got to **make it a priority**. Finding time to rest is serious business. If you don't make it a priority, I can guarantee you that no one else will, either. You can have the best of intentions, but without making a plan and prioritizing a Sabbath rest, something or someone else will come along and snatch that time away from you. They'll crank up the pace for you.

This isn't easy, but I've worked with several people to help them make a consistent Sabbath a part of their weekly routine. Everyone from college students to business owners. You might think, "there's no way I can go an entire 24 hours without working," but I promise you, if you make it a priority and protect it, you'll find a way.

And, it looks different for each of us. The Jewish Sabbath was sunset on Friday to sunset on Saturday. But, I know people who take their Sabbath day on a Thursday or Sunday. Here's what it looks like for me.

I consider Saturday my day off, so it's kind of like a flex day. It's the day I use to catch up on stuff around the house. I'll sometimes have a wedding or funeral on a Saturday. I'll do some work or go over my sermon. It's a day off. Sunday is not a Sabbath for me. As much as I love our worship gatherings, I leave here exhausted on Sunday afternoons and will often have other ministry things I find myself doing that day.

So, I take Mondays as my Sabbath day. It's the day that I protect and set apart for the Lord. I do things on Mondays that reconnect me to Him and refill my soul. That doesn't mean that I spend the entire day reading the Bible and praying.

On my Sabbath day, I enjoy an extra cup of coffee, or two, or three. I have two churches that I listen to. Their preaching nourishes to my own soul. I'll go on a run or bike ride or hop on my kayak. Spend extra time with family and enjoy a good meal. I fight against doing anything "I have to do..." and try to make it a day filled with things I want to do, or get to do. I **take time to enjoy the goodness of God and the good things in life**. That, I think, is what the Sabbath is set apart for, and it's my favorite day of the week.

And, that looks different for all of us. You just have to have the courage to say "enough!" and make it a priority for your soul to rest in the goodness and grace of God. That might mean being intentional about this.

A few weeks ago, Grant, our Middle School Minister, and his younger sister did our staff devos on the importance of taking a Sabbath rest. He brought in this poster board he made (**show picture**) called Grants Ideal Sabbath Day. It's like a story board for his best Sabbath day. And so, he has things like...(go through pictures one at a time)

You may not make a story board like Grants. You might! But yours might not have dancing on it. Whatever you do, what's one step you can take this week to practice a Sabbath day? What will you need to say "no" to so you can say "yes" to something better. What will you do to reconnect with God and refill your soul?

Sabbath Blessing – Lectio 365 App

May this day bring Sabbath rest to my heart and my home.

May God's image in me be restored, and my imagination in God be re-storied.

May the gravity of material things be lightened, and the relativity of time slow down.

May I know grace to embrace my own finite smallness in the arms of God's infinite greatness.

May God's word feed me and His Spirit lead me into the week and into the life to come.

Imagine your life at a better pace. The God pace. A life that find rest in knowing who you are and whose you are. That you don't have to run at the pace our world says is normal. You can run at a different pace, a better pace.

The Sabbath is God's invitation to stop running and find rest in Him. Will you accept it?