

Rhythms of Rest

Week 1: Stop

Follow up from last week...we're on a 7 day streak of not leaving Adalyn anywhere. Our previous record was 4,368 days. We're hoping to exceed that!

I loved playing with Legos growing up. And that was back in the day when you just got a bag of random blocks and had to use your imagination about what you were going to build. We didn't have the kits with detailed instructions like today. I just had an old, metal popcorn bucket filled to the brim with Legos. I'd pull it out and get to work.

And if you've ever played with Legos like that, you know, there's a piece in there somewhere to solve any problem you face. There's always a way to make it better. So, if you and I were playing with Legos and were building this bridge, and I asked you, how can we make it more stable? Your answer would probably be...add another block. That's what I'd do.

Buy a Professor of Engineering at the University of Virginia named Leidy Klotz was playing Legos with his son one day and they built a bridge like this. When he noticed it was uneven, Leidy reached over to grab another piece, but his son just grabbed the bridge and took a piece off. He thought, "I wonder if there's something to this?"

So, he set up a series of experiments like this and said, "Do something to make this structure more stable." And the simplest answer in every case was to just remove something to solve the problem. But, what Leidy and his team discovered is that adults overwhelmingly ***tried to solve a simple problem by adding more stuff.***

Their takeaway was that, when we try to solve problems, our tendency is to FIRST think, "What can I add" rather than "what can I remove?" Looked at through another lens, and stated just a little bit differently, when we face problems in our lives, our tendency is to ask, "What should ***I do*** to fix it?" rather than "what should I ***stop doing*** to fix it?"

Here's what's true for me, and I have a feeling it's true for all of us...our problems in life are a lot bigger than balancing out a Lego bridge. **Our problem is that we are on a constant search for significance.** Whether we know it or not, we are always asking ourselves and evaluating questions like, do I matter? Why do I matter? We're asking ourselves, "What do I have to do to make other people think I matter?"

And, for many of us, our response to these questions and **solution to this problem is I need to do as much as I can to prove that I matter.** To prove to myself and you that I matter. So we think that if we can just fill our calendars with work and events then we must matter because, *look at all I have to do.* If we can rise up the ranks at work, then we must matter because, *look at all I'm responsible for.* If we can just acquire more stuff then we must matter because, *look at all I have.* If we involve ourselves in good endeavors, then we must

matter because, *look at all I give myself to*. If we say “yes” to everything, then we must matter because, *look at all the people who want some of my time*.

In our search for significance, our first tendency, my first tendency, is to add more stuff. So we add and we add and we add and it just seems like life keeps getting more and more complicated. It feels like the more we add the further we are away from what we actually desire. And, the danger in this is, **If you define who you are (your meaning and significance), if you define who you are by what you do, then you won't know who you are when you have nothing to do.**

I think it's why so many of us have a hard time resting. We wonder, *If I stop, will I still matter? Am I still significant? Am I going to miss out on something? Are my kids going to miss out on something?* Add to that, we live in a culture that celebrates hustle. Tech advancements mean we're always accessible, which just feeds that voice inside of us that says people need us. Most of us never really learned how to put up boundaries to protect our time and, I think all of us have a general sense of FOMO. We don't want to miss out on anything. We don't want our kids or grandkids to miss out.

And so we just keep adding more and more and more to our already maxed out lives. More bricks to balance out the bridge. But, you know what else Leidy and his team found...when they reminded people, “Hey, don't forget, you can also remove pieces if that's easier...” it was almost like a light bulb turned on in their brains and they were like, “OH YEAH!” And when they were reminded of their option to remove something rather than add more, nearly all of them chose that instead.

It's almost like we need regular reminders to remove rather than add more. To stop and rest instead of do more. We need reminders that it's okay to remove stuff from our lives and our schedules instead of always adding more. As we start this new series today called Rhythms of Rest, we're going to see that, in His mercy and grace, God has given us these reminders in Scripture. He's given us permission to spend time slowing down. To say “no” to stuff instead of always adding more. And these **rhythms of rest remind us that it's okay to stop doing and just be.**

In fact, I think that's why God gave them to us. If our problem is that we are on a constant search for significance and meaning and our solution is to find it by doing more and being more so that we can prove to ourselves and others that we matter...God's solution is “No, you matter, **NOT** because of **what** you do, but because of **who** you are.” His solution is to find our value and our worth in HIM above anything else. To rest in the belief that we are His dearly loved children.

And I think it's interesting that the very first space that Scripture records God inviting humanity into is rest. Before He ever gave them good and meaningful work to do, He rested with them. This is what we read at the beginning of the Creation account. God has created everything in these periods called days, he wraps up his work by creating us in His image.

Giving us dominion and authority over the earth. And then Genesis 1:31 says...(READ Gen. 1:31-2:3)

That word “rested” that’s used a couple of times, it’s the Hebrew word “Shabbat.” It means to cease. To stop. It’s where we get the word “Sabbath.” A day of rest. And we see the value of Sabbath rooted right here in Creation. God created us and then He stopped to delight in us and for us to delight in Him. Before Adam and Eve did a single thing, God rested with them.

To me, it’s a reminder that this is who you are. You are dearly loved and loveable...not for what you do, but because of who you are. Our constant search for significance ends when we know that our value is in the Lord. We are dearly loved by Him. Cared for by Him. He looks at you like parents marveling over their newborn child. You don’t have to earn His love or your significance. It’s already deeply established in who you are.

It’s like when our girls were born. We could just sit there for hours holding them, rocking them. They didn’t have to do anything and we just rejoiced over them. There were things around the house that needed to be done, but none of that mattered in those sometimes brief moments of resting together. And, you know what no one has ever asks the parents of a newborn baby? “Why do you love that kid so much? She’s never done a thing for you!”

And yet, as we grow older, we think that we have to earn our significance and the approval of others by what we do and so we just keep doing more. And, somewhere along the way we transfer that over to God and think that’s what he must feel about us, too. And we want to make the most of our life and our time, so we just keep adding more to it.

And all the while, God just wants us to enjoy the rhythms of rest that He’s invited us into. He knows that the solution to our search for significance is not in doing more, but in slowing down and resting in Him. Rejoicing in who He is and what He’s done for us. These rhythms of rest remind us that it’s okay to stop doing and just be.

And the rhythms of rest that God established for His people go so much further than just keeping the Sabbath every 7 days. We see it in the Creation poem of Genesis 1. Each section ends with “there was evening and there was morning...the 1st day, 2nd day...etc. The reminder to slow down and rest...to not find our significance in more...it was baked into the day. The Jewish day started at sunset, so each day begins with rest, not work.

There were annual feasts and festivals that were times of celebration and worship. People from all over would stop their work and gather together as a community for sometimes days on end to remember God’s faithfulness and love for them. There were special days and ceremonies God set aside for His people to reflect and repent. To renew their commitment to Him as first priority.

All of these annual days and weeks served as regular reminders to slow down, take things off your plate, and focus on who you are and whose you are. They were reminders of their identity as God's chosen and dearly loved children. It was time set aside to rest and rejoice in Him.

There was another rhythm of rest the Israelites were instructed to observe. It's found in **Exodus 23:10...(READ 10a)**. This seventh year is called a Sabbatical. It was an extended time for the ground to rest and reset. It was a reminder of God's provision and ownership of the land. That God owns it all and we can trust and rest in Him.

And, this concept of sabbatical has been pulled from this context to represent an extended time of rest and renewal and preparation for the next season. And several years ago, the elders at Sherwood Oaks had the wisdom to create a Sabbatical policy for all of our ministerial staff. And so, in our 7th year of ministry, our staff is given a sabbatical to get away for rest and renewal. It's a rhythm they've created for us based on these rhythms God gave us.

It's hard to believe, but I'm about to finish my 7th year of ministry here at Sherwood Oaks, which means I'm almost past due for my sabbatical. And, back in August, our elders graciously considered the demands of the last 7 years of ministry, the last 4 in particular, and the state of spiritual and emotional health of ministers...and they gifted me with a 12 week Sabbatical instead of our typical 6 weeks. They said, "We want to keep you healthy and in the game for the long-haul."

And so, next Sunday, May 12th, I'm going to preach, and at noon...or 12:05pm, depending on how the service goes...my Sabbatical will begin. I'll be gone all summer and will be back in the office on Tuesday, August 6th.

I wanted to share this with you for a couple of reasons. One, in my time here, I've always noticed that Sabbaticals were never talked about. It's like, one of ministers would go on sabbatical and they'd just disappear. "Where'd they go?!" I get it...we don't want to make a big deal out of it. Many of you work a lot harder, in more demanding jobs than we do, and don't get a Sabbatical.

And so, I get not wanting to flaunt this out there. But I also think it's a missed opportunity to invite you all, our church family, into the rest and renewal of Sabbatical with us. To pray for us and step up in our absence to continue faithfully serving and gathering. Continuing the ministry even if one of us is not here.

I also wanted to be more open about my Sabbatical because, within those 12 weeks...hopefully you would have noticed I was gone! And if you hear 2nd hand that I'm on Sabbatical, it leaves a lot of room for....*Ooh, I wonder what he did?* Like, is Sabbatical code for forced time away? It's not. We've been planning this for almost 9 months. No one is making me take time off and I have no plans of going anywhere!

A lot of people have asked me what I'm doing on my Sabbatical. Simple answer: Whatever I want! Family vacation, Allen Burris and I developed a spiritual formation plan for while I'm away. Spend some extra time with the girls. Maybe get a pool pass! The options are endless!

And while I'm away, our staff team will be led by our Executive Ministers, Maggie Mobley and Jeremy Earle. They have everything they need to continue to lead our church during my time away. Ministry isn't going to slow down because I'm gone. They're moving full steam ahead.

On Sundays, we've got a great group of people coming in to preach. I'm especially excited about our June series. We're calling it "Hoosiers" and I've invited some of my favorite Indiana preachers to come share with you all. There might be some familiar faces that pop up.

All that to say, our church is in really good hands while I'm away. I have no concerns about that. In fact, here's the only thing I'm struggling with as I go into this Sabbatical...this is the most fulfilling season of ministry I've ever been in. I love our church. I love the people I get to serve alongside of. I love our staff and elders. I'm actually sad that I'm going to be away from them for 12 weeks. I'm going to miss them and I'm going to miss what I get to be a part of every day.

And as I've reflected on this, I've come to realize that there is a sacrifice in rest. Like, I feel really healthy right now. I'm in a good place and love what I get to do. I'm more passionate and motivated than I've ever been...and so it feels weird to step away right now. I want to keep running. I want to keep doing. I want to add more. And I just keep hearing the Lord whisper to my soul, "No, stop. Rest." And I'm like, "Yeah, God, I don't know if you know this or not, but there's so much to do!" and He's saying, "Trust me with your unfinished work."

That's why these rhythms of rest are so important. There will always be more work to do, more stuff to add...but doing **more** only feeds this god-complex that most of us have...that it's all up to me. That if I don't do it, then it won't get done or it's all going to fall apart. Rhythms of rest remind us there is One God, and we're not Him. There's only One who holds the world together, and it's not me.

In fact, when the author and sustainer of life took on flesh and stepped into the world He created, he showed us the value of rest. Jesus would often withdraw to quiet places. Sometimes he would invite his friends to join him. And they would struggle because they were like, "Lord, don't you know there's work to do?!" And yet Jesus would say, "Come, get away with me. Stop doing for a moment and just be."

Our natural tendency is to just keep adding more, but over the next month, is there ONE block you can remove to make life feel a little more stable? If there something you can say “no” to so you can say “yes” to the things and people that matter most?

And if a month is too long, make it a week. Make it a day. Maybe it’s as simple as saying “no” to something, and then putting it on your calendar so you can celebrate not doing that thing on that day.

We’re going to talk more about how to do this over the next few weeks, but the main point of the series is what I said earlier... **Rhythms of rest remind us that it’s okay to stop doing and just be.** Jesus needed those moments, and we do, too. We need moments to remember that we are dearly loved children of God. And if we ever question that, all we need to do is look at the cross.

(Communion is a rhythm of rest that Jesus invites us into. A chance to slow down and remember what matters most.)