

Come to Me, All Who Are Weary

Big Idea: Rhythms of rest and recreation are a critical component of Jesus' invitation into a life of love.

Introduction

Let me ask you something. The next time someone asks how you are doing – how will you answer that? Maybe you've already been asked that question this morning. If you and I are honest, there is a good chance the answer is somewhere in the neighbourhood of "busy," or "tired," or maybe just a long exhale that says more than any word ever could. I know because I've been there. I've given that answer. And I've heard it so many times that I sometimes wonder if exhaustion has simply become so normal that we don't even question it.

I love this time of year. There is something about the way spring gives way to summer - longer evenings, the smell of cut grass, lilacs in bloom, the sense that something lighter is just around the corner. And yet, if I am being honest with you and with myself, I also notice that many of us seem to be "crash-landing" into summer. Low-grade exhaustion has become so familiar that we have stopped noticing it. It feels like the new normal.

Author and Computer Science Professor, Cal Newport describes how on the other side of the pandemic, we are in the era of the Great Exhaustion which I mean makes sense – we live in a culture where busyness is seen as a badge of honour, we are often multitasking (think of like keeping multiple tabs open on your computer at once – or maybe that is just me!) and we live in

a culture of urgency where we are constantly accessible to everyone **all the time**. The reality is that it's impacting our physical and mental well-being.

And I don't think that is what God had in mind for us.

Today we are diving into a five-week series called Rest and Recreation. Over these weeks, we are going to invite one another to **slow down**. To catch our breath. To look at Jesus' invitation toward a life of love and consider: Does Jesus intend for us to be this busy and tired? And then, to help us grow in rhythms of rest and recreation, we'll look at an ancient practice throughout this series that Jesus himself embraced and lived – known as the practice of Sabbath - and we are going to ask what it might look like to recover something we have lost. Not just rest as an item to check off on our to-do list, but rest as a way of *being*. A rhythm. A practice that shapes the kind of people we are becoming.

Today I want us to consider why Sabbath matters, what it is, and how it flows from the very life and practice of Jesus. Because here is the invitation at the heart of this series: Sabbath is not a rule to keep. It is a gift to receive. And it's a gift that changes everything.

1: A Vision for Rest in a World of Busy and Burnt Out

I want to share a passage from Matthew 11. Jesus speaks these words to a crowd who was exhausted, and I want you to let them land as though you are hearing them for the very first time. Listen carefully, because I believe he is speaking directly into the exhaustion of our lives right now.

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

Matthew 11:28–30 (The Message)

Are you tired? Jesus asks. I mean, who isn’t? He’s not surprised by our exhaustion. He sees it. He sees *us*. And his response is not a lecture or a program or a productivity hack. His response is an *invitation*: Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life.

Notice what he says next: “I’ll show you how to take a real rest.” Not a nap. Not a vacation. *Real rest*. The kind that restores something deep within us. The kind that doesn’t just address the symptoms but actually heals the root. And the pathway to that rest is a rhythm of *relationship* - walking with Jesus, working with Jesus, keeping company with Jesus.

Personally, I love this phrase: the unforced rhythms of grace. When I hear that, it’s like my whole body softens. Doesn’t that sound like good news? Unforced. Not striving. Not panicking. Not performing. There is a rhythm available to us that is not driven by anxiety or ambition, but by grace. Jesus says, watch how I do it. Learn from me.

So how does that invitation land with you? Are you longing for that kind of rest? Are you eager for that kind of rhythm of walking with Jesus in his rhythms of rest, recovery, grace, and freedom?

Well, to help us consider how we might respond to Jesus' invitation - learning to walk with him and grow in experiencing this kind of rest in our lives, I want to introduce us to the ancient rhythm of Sabbath that Jesus himself practiced.

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2: Sabbath as Jesus' Practice to Live a Life of Rhythm and Rest

So, what do we mean by Sabbath? Let's go back to the very beginning. In Genesis 2, after six days of creative work, we see that God rested. The Hebrew word for Sabbath is Shabbat, which simply means to cease, to stop, to rest. And then in Exodus, the practice of Sabbath is formalized in the Ten Commandments. The people of Israel are instructed to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. One day in seven, set apart. A rhythm woven into the fabric of creation itself.

And here is what I have come to understand: Sabbath is more than just a day off. It is a way of being in the world. The practice of Sabbath is a day of rest by which we cultivate a spirit of restfulness in *all* of life. It is a practice by which we undergo a dramatic shift - from restlessness to restfulness, from hurry to peace, from busyness to margin, from burnout to a sustainable pace, from noise to quiet, from distraction to clarity, from grasping to gratitude.

There is also something beautiful in how the ancient Hebrews understood time. The biblical day began not at sunrise, but at dusk. Each new day began with evening; the day began with rest. Think about what that communicates. We do not earn our rest. We begin with rest. We live from rest, not for it. Rest is not the reward at the end of a productive day. It is the gift at the beginning.

I saw a poster recently that simply read: *As slowly as possible*. I couldn't stop thinking about this phrase. I began to reflect - What if I applied that to a conversation with a friend? To savouring a cup of coffee in the morning? To eating a meal without looking at my phone? To watching the sun set over Lake Ontario? What if slowly became a spiritual practice? What if attentiveness became a form of prayer?

The late poet Mary Oliver spent her life paying attention to the world around her. She wrote about grasshoppers and swans and the beauty of ordinary summer days with a kind of awe and delight that I find deeply compelling. She understood that living a life of paying attention requires slowing down. You cannot truly see what you are racing past. And near the end of her poem entitled "When Death Comes," she writes that when her life is over, she does not want to have simply visited this world. She wanted to have been a bride married to amazement, a bridegroom taking the world in her arms. That is a person who has learned to pay attention.

And in the poem "The Summer Day," she closes with a question that I believe is one of the most important questions that you and I could sit with this summer. She writes, : *Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?*

What would it mean to answer that question not from a place of hurry and exhaustion, but from a place of rest and renewal?

3: Why Sabbath Matters — Because of Love

For me, there is really just one question at the heart of all of this. *Why does Sabbath matter so much?* Why is Jesus so insistent on this practice? Why does he model it again and again throughout his ministry, slipping away to lonely places, resting in the stern of a boat during a storm, gathering his disciples and saying, come away with me to a quiet place and get some rest?

The answer, I believe, is love.

How many of us are abounding in love when we are tired? Think about it honestly. When you and I are exhausted, depleted, running on empty - what does our love look like? What does our patience look like? What does our generosity look like? I think we all know the answer. We are at our worst when we are tired and in a hurry. We are at our best when we are rested, grounded, and unhurried.

I have been thinking about St. Francis of Assisi lately. Living in the twelfth century, he built his entire life around simplicity, slowness, and attentiveness. That attentiveness transformed both the people he served and himself in the process. He noticed things others rushed past. He found the sacred in the ordinary. He paid attention. The turning point of his life came when he encountered a man living with leprosy outside the city - someone avoided by everyone, shrouded in stigma, fear, and repulsion. He laid eyes on the man, approached him from a place of shared humanity, and in that moment, the fear and disgust loosened their grip. Francis embraced the man, and the encounter changed the entire trajectory of his life.

So why am I sharing this story? Because what I love about Francis is that out of that encounter his life's work became one of meeting suffering with compassion and love - and guess what sustained him in that work? He did this by unapologetically building rhythms of rest and retreat into his life. His vocation and his calling had incredible impact – and flowed out of rhythms of rest and retreat as he learned and practiced the unforced rhythms of grace.

In John 13:35, Jesus says: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” The defining characteristic of a Jesus follower is a life of love. Love - active, gritty, sacrificial, patient, generous, others-oriented love. And I am convinced that we cannot overflow with that kind of love when we are exhausted, burnt out and running on fumes.

What if a summer of rest and renewal and recreation created the space for us to actually recover our lives? What if learning the unforced rhythms of grace made us more loving, more present, more creative, more alive, more joyful? What if this community, what if each of us became known but by our love? Imagine what is possible!

Closing: An Invitation

In closing, I want to be honest about something. I felt a lot of resistance writing this message. Because slowing down is hard. And it has to begin with me. I cannot invite you into something I am not willing to live myself. And the truth is, I am not always great at this. The pull toward hustle and hurry and productivity is real (and let's face it society rewards us for it). The pressure to produce, to perform, to keep up - it is constant.

But when I look at Jesus, I see something that I long for. A life that is slow and rich and connected and uncomplicated. He was never in a rush, and yet he never missed anything

important. He was never scattered, and yet he was fully present to everyone he encountered. He lived from rest. He embodied love. And he says to each of us today: **come and learn from me.**

Personally, I want my work and my life to flow from that place of slowness and rest, not from adrenaline or hustle or striving. I want to walk more and more in step with Jesus as I learn the unforced rhythms of grace. And I know I cannot do it alone. And neither can you. We need the support of one another as we grow to live in the lightness and freedom that Jesus makes available to us.

Now, I want to acknowledge that a full day of Sabbath each week might feel impossible for some of you right now. This message is intended to be heard as good news and not as something causing shame or guilt. Not at all. Instead, I want to invite you to start small. What is one step you could take this week toward rest? Toward Jesus? Toward moving just a little bit more slowly? Maybe it's a morning walk without your phone. Maybe it's sitting quietly for ten minutes before the day begins. Perhaps it's silencing the notifications on your phone. Maybe it's saying no to one thing so you can say yes to something restoring.

Imagine arriving in September - rested. Imagine how much love we could know and share and experience within us and among us. Imagine what might be possible for our relationships, our families, our health, our community. Imagine what God might be able to do in and through people who are refreshed, renewed, rested, and restored.

The way of Jesus is the way of love. And it begins with us receiving the invitation to come to him just as we are in all of our weariness and exhaustion as we learn the unforced rhythms of grace.

Over the next four weeks, we will explore Sabbath together more deeply. Next week: Sabbath as Stopping. Then: Sabbath as Resting. Week four: Sabbath as Delighting. And our final week: Sabbath as Worshipping. I'm so looking forward to being on this journey with each of you – deeply aware that the goal of a Sabbath way of life is that we spend time with Jesus, become like Jesus, live and love like Jesus. And so may each of us, in between these weekly encouragements to rest—be brave enough to take even small steps toward taking up Jesus' invitation to find rest in Him.

In closing, I'd like to pray a short benediction over each of us. It's one that we will close with each week during this series: *May the God of rest fill you with his peace and presence as you rest in him.*