

Rest & Re-Creation | Stop

In 2019, *BuzzFeed News* released an essay describing Millennials – the generation I’m part of – as the “Burned Out” generation. In 2024, psychologist and author, Jonathan Haidt, labelled Gen Z as the “Anxious Generation.” And even if you’re older than both those demographics, perhaps you’re familiar with the environment I grew up in where the term “Busy” wasn’t just a way to describe rush hour traffic, but actually a way of life to be aspired to and a badge of honour to wear in our work, in family, and sometimes, most of all, in church as well. Having all of this add up to a *culture of restlessness* we find ourselves in today.

And yet, as we heard last week from Carrie Jones, restless burnout, busyness, and anxiety is actually a long way from the kind of life Jesus invites us into and wants to provide for our lives. As we heard from **Matthew 11:28-30**, where Jesus said:

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. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.

Friends, that’s what this series on *Rest & Re-Creation* is all about, coming to Jesus with all of our weariness, all of our burnout, all of our busyness and anxiety, and seeking to learn from him how to recover our lives, especially through Jesus’ own rhythms of rest and re-creation so that we can all live more freely and lightly. To help us do that, last week Carrie introduced us to the rhythm of Sabbath that Jesus practiced and that we find woven into the fabric of creation right from the first pages of the Bible. Where, after God worked for six days to create the heavens and the earth, we read this in **Genesis 2:1-3**:

So the creation of the heavens and the earth and everything in them was completed. On the seventh day God had finished his work of creation, so God rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because it was the day when he rested from all his work of creation.

I want to invite us to let this sink in for a few moments. That the all-powerful God of the universe, with the capacity to speak everything into existence and the power to sustain all life by his Spirit, *rested*. Took a break. Stopped his work. Now, you may think: “*Yeah, but in my life, I just have so much responsibility, there’s so many things depending on me...*” God rested. “*But I just feel so much purpose in being productive, in making a difference, in constantly moving things forward...*” God rested. “*But I need to get the highest marks, I need to keep working for that promotion, I need to say ‘yes’ because they asked me...*” God rested.

That not only did God build this rhythm of Sabbath rest into the fabric of his creation, but God himself as the Creator of all things *rested*, revealing to all of his creation and especially to the human beings made in his image that rhythms of both work and rest are part of the full and beautiful picture of who God is and the life he’s made us for.

In fact, Sabbath rest is intended to be such a key part of the kind of life God has in mind for us that, did you know that keeping a Sabbath rhythm is actually one of the Ten Commandments? That right alongside the commandments about not making idols or having other Gods, and not killing, cheating, stealing, or committing adultery, we read this as commandment number four in **Exodus 20:8-11**:

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated 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. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and everything in them, but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy.

That according to these foundational commands for life with God and the kind of community God originally called his people to establish and share with others, remembering the Sabbath and resting from work for a full day each week is actually on God’s top ten list.

Now, let me say right here, before we get into unpacking more of what this might look like for us today and throughout the rest of this series, that God's command about Sabbath-keeping is not intended to be some arbitrary religious rule or standard that humans have to rigorously live up to if they're going to make God happy. Not only have we already seen that this is actually a rhythm built into the very being of God himself, but later on, Jesus was adamant about correcting the religious leaders of his day who had made the Sabbath about legalistic religious rule-keeping, by telling them that: ***The Sabbath was made to meet the needs of people, and not people to meet the requirements of the Sabbath. (Mark 2:27)***

So then, what *needs* does God's command for humans to embrace the Sabbath meet in our lives? Well, perhaps the first are obvious, going back to Jesus' questions about whether we're *tired* and *worn out* and how he wants to *show us how to take a real rest*. But more than that, what I find fascinating about Sabbath as part of the Ten Commandments is that not only is it on the "Top Ten" list, it's actually the biggest and most thorough command of the entire list. In the original Hebrew, the Ten Commandments are made up of somewhere between 150-170 total words depending on the manuscript, with the command about Sabbath-keeping being 50-60 of those words. If you turned this into a **Pie Chart**, you can see how that's over 30% of what God wanted to say when he provided the Ten Commandments! So why is that?

On the one hand, perhaps explaining the purpose and practice of Sabbath is a little more complex than saying, "*Don't murder.*" But on a deeper level, I think it's because of how God's rhythm of rest – that is so deeply embedded in God's own character and image – actually has the power and potential to help us follow the rest of the commands. You see, the other nine commandments fall into two basic categories, with the first three being about loving God and the last six about loving people. With the command about remembering the Sabbath as a link between the two. Because the truth is, we're not good at loving when we're restless.

Am I right? I mean, think about the last time you were super worn out and tired. Is that when you were also most patient and kind? Or when you were hurried and overbusied. Is that when you were thinking of ways to put others first? The truth is when we're tired, we're irritable. When we're worn out, we're discontent. When we're on the verge of burnout we become afraid and anxious. All of which makes us more inclined to cut corners in our lives by cheating or lying. To begin to desire what isn't ours through greed and lust. To grow angry and irritated, believing that others are to blame for what's wrong in the world, causing us at times to want the worst, rather than the best, for our fellow human beings. And in the process, losing sight of the God who made us. And loves us. And wants the best for us. And is watching over our lives so much so that he wants us to know it's okay to stop and rest. That that is what we're made for and exactly the kind of life Jesus modeled and invites us to follow.

Friends, I think this is what's at stake in God's vision for Sabbath rest. That a *rested* society is less likely to idolize, cheat, covet, or kill. And thus, can then become a *re-created* society into people who love our neighbours as ourselves, just as Jesus taught and modelled.

So with that, what might it look like to begin to embrace and practice a rhythm of Sabbath rest in our own lives? Well, throughout this series we want to explore four main **Principles of Sabbath**. That Sabbath is an invitation to ***Stop, Rest, Delight, and Worship***. Starting today, with the Sabbath idea of taking time to actually ***stop*** in our lives. That the first thing Sabbath requires is stopping. That before we *do* anything with Sabbath, we actually need to *stop* long enough from everything else we're obsessed with doing in order to begin to enter into the real rest that God has for us. If we go back to **Genesis 2** for a moment, the word that gets translated as "***rested***" can also be translated as "***ceased***." That God *ceased* his work. That God *ceased* what he was doing. That God spent a full day – and then built that day into the rhythm of creation – to *cease* from and fully ***stop*** the need to do anything.

Now, the first and most obvious application for *stopping* in Sabbath is to stop from our work, just as it says, “*God ceased from all his work*” and “*you have six days for your work*.” And perhaps for some of us, if our day job or career or business or schooling has become such a focal point in our lives that we’re basically working seven days a week – or even when we have scheduled days off or weekends, we’re “always on” with texts, emails, or calls that our work has become more like 24/7 than 6 out of 7 – that for some of us, we need to take the first step of actually committing to some time in our week where we fully and completely stop from work. To shut it down and turn it off to begin to enter the rhythm of Sabbath rest.

Or maybe we have “days off” built into our weekly routine, but those quickly get filled by a laundry list of other appointments, chores, and to-do lists – all of life’s “work” that you don’t get paid for. And learning to stop means intentionally re-arranging this “work” in our lives to make sure it all fits within a six-day rhythm so there’s room to *stop* on a seventh.

Yet for others, perhaps you’re pretty good at stopping from your day job and appointments on evenings and weekends, but if you pause and reflect, do you ever really *fully stop* from busying your body, mind, or attention? Because in the anxious and indulgent age we live in, most of us aren’t that good at fully stopping. Stopping from scrolling. Stopping from shopping. Stopping from gaming. Stopping from texting. Stopping from list-making. Stopping from chores. Stopping from planning. Stopping from binging. Stopping from debating. Stopping from worrying. Or stopping from missing out on meeting God in the midst of it all.

Because that’s the ultimate point of our stopping. Not just to fully *stop* to begin to enter a *real rest*. But to fully and completely stop long enough so that we can be present to God and grow our trust in him. As Pete Scazzero says in ***Emotionally Healthy Spirituality***:

The core spiritual issue in stopping revolves around trust. We stop on Sabbaths because God is on the throne, assuring us the world will not fall apart if we

cease our activities. On Sabbath we embrace our limits, God is God. He is indispensable. We are his creatures. The world continues working fine when I stop.

Friends, do you believe that? Or at least, do you want to believe that? And if so, how are you doing when it comes to *stopping* in the rhythm of your life?

I know I can find this very difficult to do (or should we say, *not do*, in the spirit of stopping). And even though I've been working to embrace more of a Sabbath-like rhythm over the last number of years, my ability to *fully stop* and not keep making mental lists, or feel anxious that I'm not being productive enough, or constantly be distracted by screens and notifications can be very low – often causing me to miss out on a deeper experience of God, the people around me, and the rhythm of recovery, rest, and freedom that Jesus wants for us. And while there's a lot of factors that go into this, there might be no greater barrier in my life and in our restless day and age that keeps us from fully stopping than *this* (iPhone).

A couple weeks ago, Lindsay and I were fortunate to get away for a week of vacation with just the two of us, which was a beautiful opportunity for quality time together and some much-needed R&R. However, I also knew I needed it to be an intentional and unplugged break from *this* (iPhone). And so, for most of our time away my phone was on Airplane mode and even left behind in our room. And while that was helpful, it also made me strangely aware of the central nervous system withdrawal I had to go through in order to recover what it's like to not have your jean pocket constantly buzzing – or to perpetually think it *might be* buzzing – every few minutes. And then in preparation for this series, I was reminded of a bonus feature on my phone I recently learned about. You see, I got a new iPhone at Christmas, and even though I'm not that techy, I think I've discovered most of the Apps and features that I find useful. But I recently realized there's one factory feature that I don't think I've ever used since getting this phone at Christmas, a feature that your phone may have too.

So if you have a smartphone, I want to invite you to pull it out to show you something. Cause this may be the simplest and most helpful first step in learning to stop together these days. Cause whether or not you have an iPhone, your phone may have this feature.

That if you hold it up, and then simply press and hold this side button – and on mine, along with one of the volume buttons at the same time – look what pops up: *Power Off*. Did you know that?! That in all the incredible and age-changing and endlessly distracting things this thing can do, *powering off* – fully stopping – is also one of them!

So here's my invitation for us this week, especially if you're finding stopping to be a challenge and can relate to how our devices are one of our greatest barriers. What if we all took some dedicated time to use the *Power Off* feature this week? And I don't just mean when you're finally ready to crash land into bed – although keeping your phone off and away from your bed can be a helpful spiritual practice – but during some prime waking hours when you could otherwise be available and productive. What if we all committed to stopping by powering off? Maybe for you, you just need to start with 15 minutes as a symbol of the baby step of learning to stop. Maybe you could do an hour. Some people may even aspire to 24 hours. For me, I'm going to try powering off for four hours on my day off this week. As a way to start turning my day off into something more like a Sabbath. A time where I can respond to God's gift and invitation to fully stop. To cease. To recognize that God is with me and that the world will carry on just fine even when I stop. To begin to learn the rhythms of rest and recovery – Jesus' unforced rhythms of grace that mean we don't have to respond to every message immediately or cross everything off our to-do lists. To learn to live more freely and lightly. And to stop long enough to begin to make space for the *rest, delight, and worship* that Jesus wants to pour into our lives in the upcoming weeks of this series.

Friends, while there's so much that Jesus invites us *to do* when it comes to following him in a life of love, there are also times – necessary and God-created rhythms – where Jesus simply invites us to *stop*. To stop and not miss all the life and love he wants to provide.

Let's pray together...