

Fight, Flight, or Seek
Rest(less) Week Two: July 15, 2018
Psalm 27

Welcome/intro/vision

Week two in a brand new series called Rest(less)

Talking about this nearly universal experience we all have from time to time: faith, no faith, church person or not, almost all of us have seasons where we struggle with restlessness

SOMETIMES we look back on those seasons of restlessness and we see that it was leading us somewhere and it got us going in a good way

But OFTEN what I hear from people is that there are decisions that got made in the season of restlessness that they look back on later and they REGRET

In their restlessness, they made restless decisions that had painful consequences

Here's a deeper definition that I've been working with this week, let's see if this resonates:

Restlessness is unsettledness with where you are and what you're doing because you have a sense that something's not RIGHT with where you are and what you're doing AND you feel a little stuck or trapped

Two years before I came to Chatham Community Church, I took a new position with my former employer which was working with college students doing campus ministry

And that promotion took me away from what I loved to do and what I did best, and I didn't like it and it freaked me out

because I'd been with that organization for 15 years and I didn't want to go back to what I was doing before but everything further UP the food chain just looked like a worse and worse fit for me

And so I wasn't doing what I thought I was made to do but I wasn't sure where to go next—I was feeling restless—and I'm sure I was utterly charming to live with!

But mixed in with that SITUATIONAL restlessness, there were some deeper core issues of where I was going to look for my identity and sense of self-worth, that were at the CORE of what was really making me restless

And if I did not deal with that core spiritual component, I was going to bring that same core restless spirit INTO the next situation

My proposal for this series is: we often miss that at the core, restlessness is a spiritual, not a situational problem

You can be REST-LESS if you've got too little to do or too much to do

You can get restless even on vacation--EVEN vacation at the BEACH! which is pretty much as close to paradise as we get here on this earth!

American culture spends more money on entertainment and travel and leisure and games and sports than any other culture in all of history

AND YET even with all that money poured into play and leisure and attempting to get away and get recharged

I don't think anyone would say that our country is a people at peace with ourselves and with one another

Restlessness is an inability to make peace with where you are and what you're doing because you have a sense that something's not RIGHT with where you are, what you're doing

And you feel a little stuck or trapped—but we often miss the spiritual core of restlessness

My true confession this morning is that when I make restless decisions they are usually foolish decisions

what about you? what's your track record on RESTLESS decisions? Have you found that restless decision-making is a recipe for flourishing or for failure?

What we want to do this morning and throughout this series is get to the spiritual heart of our restlessness that we might live more settled, more peaceful lives that are do what we were put here to do:

to love God, love one another, and go to work bringing your gifts and abilities to make this world to come more fully alive.

When we feel stuck, most natural response: fight or flight.

This morning we're going to look at a passage in the Scriptures where the author named David is stuck in a classic fight or flight situation

and instead of doing either one of those first he's going to offer us a third, better option

And that third, better option is going to help us to quiet our restlessness in a way that actually addresses the spiritual roots of the problem

Because restlessness, at its core, is not FIRST a situational problem but it's FIRST a spiritual problem

We're going to look at Psalm 27: Bible/no Bible

New to the Bible, so glad you're here, Psalms is an ancient collection of prayers and poems and worship songs, written and collected about 1,000 years before Christ

Jews and Christians for centuries have found this collection to be a gold mine of spiritual practice for learning how to connect with God in every season or experience of our lives

And Psalm 27 is a much beloved favorite Psalm throughout the centuries, written by a man named David who was king of Israel

and while his son Solomon ruled at the height of Israel's super-power years, it was Solomon's dad David who is the most celebrated king in ancient Israel's history

And the reason why he's celebrated so richly is not only was he a good king,

He was a wonderfully imperfect man who kept coming back to God over and over and over again through his own stupid mistakes and in the midst of all kinds of ups and downs in is circumstances which is what we see here in Psalm 27

***The Lord is my light and my salvation—
whom shall I fear?***

***The Lord is the stronghold of my life—
of whom shall I be afraid?***

Classic story of some friends of ours who had a toddler who was in another room and a little too quiet for too long—and if you've ever lived with a toddler, you know that's never good when they're too quiet for too long!

So the mom called out "what you doing?"

To which the toddler replied: "I am not writing on myself!"

Dead give-away!

This is a classic way for the Psalms to open up—full of faith and confidence and certainty in God and in God's care and provision

But if David is saying "I am not afraid of anyone!" what does that tell you about their situation?

That they've likely got something to be afraid of!

Which leads right into this:

***² When the wicked advance against me
to devour me, [AH!]***

***it is my enemies and my foes
who will stumble and fall.***

***³ Though an army besiege me,
my heart will not fear;***

***though war break out against me,
even then I will be confident.***

So now we know that there's bad guys advancing on David, and he's having to figure out what to do about it

This is actually nothing new for David. He was a warrior-king and throughout his whole life he faced enemies and opposition and battles

So he gets lots of opportunities to practice what to do in these types of situations and how to handle them

And this is a helpful corrective for some of us who somewhere along the way got the message that if we trusted in God we'd never have problems with enemies or difficult situations

David was described as a man of after God's own heart and yet his whole life was full of days of troubles and challenges

Troubles and challenges are going to come at ALL of us, whether you're a Jesus person here or not, whether you're spiritual or religious or not

the only question is what are we going to do about it AND what gives us the best resources and best instructions in how to handle it?

And of course, David's and our most natural options are what we talked about earlier: fight or flight. And throughout the course of David's life, he'll choose to do both

But David is at his best when chooses a third way FIRST—here it is:

***⁴ One thing I ask from the Lord,
this only do I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,
to gaze on the beauty of the Lord
and to seek him in his temple.***

Put a flag on all those 'seeking' words, we'll come back to that in a bit, let's read a little bit more of David's response to these enemies coming at him:

***⁵For in the day of trouble
he will keep me safe in his dwelling;
he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent
and set me high upon a rock.***

***⁶Then my head will be exalted
above the enemies who surround me;
at his sacred tent I will sacrifice with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make music to the Lord.***

***⁷Hear my voice when I call, Lord;
be merciful to me and answer me.***

***⁸My heart says of you, "Seek his face!"
Your face, Lord, I will seek.***

⁹Do not hide your face from me,

***do not turn your servant away in anger;
you have been my helper.***

I have had a vision problem for just about my whole life
by 4th grade or so I had big huge glasses to go along with a mouth full of braces and
really big Art Garfunkel-like hair on top of a tooth-pick-like body
it wasn't pretty

I've needed corrective glasses or contact lenses to help my vision for most of my life

But when it comes to troubles and challenging situations, my vision is even worse. And I need
even more help to see clearly

And it's perhaps David's SPIRITUAL eyesight that is the most compelling part of his character
and his personality

***4 One thing I ask from the Lord,
this only do I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,
to gaze on the beauty of the Lord
and to seek him in his temple.***

...

***8 My heart says of you, "Seek his face!"
Your face, Lord, I will seek.***

One thing I ask from the Lord: not deliverance from enemies primarily, although that's
obviously in play here and something that David wants

But when crisis hits, David sees better than I do—or at least he is clearer about what kind of
seeing he needs to have

Because when crisis hits, what most dominates your internal imagination and the eyes of your
heart: the crisis or the God who is over the crisis?

When I'm in a stressful situation the thing that most dominates my internal imagination and the
eyes of my heart
is the problem, I'm rehearsing it and rehashing it over and over again in my mind

*But in the midst of troubles and persecution and challenges and enemies, what dominates
David's VISION is not the enemies but the God who is bigger than the enemies*

And so in the midst of opposition and crisis, David doesn't just have two options, it's *not JUST
fight or flight, but it's SEEK and SEEK FIRST*

If we're going to fight restlessness, we're going to have to learn this practice, to see and to seek in this way

Because if restlessness is an inability to make peace with where you are and what you're doing because you have a sense that something's not RIGHT with where you are and what you're doing and you feel a little stuck or trapped

It's going to be tempting to have the problem situation or circumstances be the thing that dominates our mental and emotional landscape

And what David is calling us to do instead is to SEEK FIRST the presence of the Lord, the goodness of the Lord

and to let HIM quiet some of the voices of restlessness because some of them are just fluff, that are just noise, that are just our selfishness or our pride or a product of the expectations of our culture to be entertained at all times

If we seek and find God FIRST, we will be at peace with God and with ourselves FIRST

AND THEN we might, indeed, make fight or flight decisions, just like David did sometimes, but it won't be out of ambition or pride or boredom

But it'll be from a deeper, more rooted place

C.S. Lewis put it this way when he was talking about this type of situation: ***if we put first things first, we get second things thrown in. If we put second things first, we lose BOTH first and second things***

So if we put God first, we get the secondary issues of our restlessness dealt with by our relationship with him

If we try to tackle our restlessness first, it'll never really go away and we'll have missed out on the most important thing, which is God himself

If restlessness typically includes some feeling of being stuck or trapped

It's crucial to see that you DO have decisions that you can make. Fight or flight might not be an option or not a good option, BUT SEEKING GOD FIRST always, always is—and it's the better option that actually deals with the core problem

One great old dead guy put it this way in a prayer he wrote: ***"You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you."***

When our hearts have found their rest in God first, THEN we can start to deal with and address the circumstances or situations that are making us uneasy or where we feel a little stuck

This is a prayer and a statement of fact to a God who is inviting us into a personal level of engagement, a personal level of involvement

And this God is personal, accessible, and it's not some vague God, not some force making sure it'll all work out in the end

⁵For in the day of trouble

***he will keep me safe in his dwelling;
he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent
and set me high upon a rock.***

Who is the active agent in all of this? God is. How does David know with so much certainty that God will do all this for him?

Because he's spent years and years cultivating it, practicing, experiencing God's deliverance

David knows the character of God, he's practiced it and trusted in it before so that WHEN—NOT IF--the day of trouble comes, he's ready

My senior year of college I decided to try to learn how to play guitar. Key word: tried! The fact that you've never heard or seen me attempt to play guitar up here is indicative of how well that went!

But early on I learned a few basic cords that made up most of the songs that I wanted to play and I would practice those: G, C, D, A, E, repeat

And I would even walk around without the guitar in my hand, on my way to class, playing air guitar cords with my fingers

Because so much of good guitar playing eventually comes down to muscle memory—practice the right movements often enough and eventually your fingers just know where to put themselves when it's time for a that cord

Muscle memory is how people who play a great guitar do what they do--but this isn't just true for great guitarists or musicians:

Most of what we do as adults is muscle memory. Sometimes it's emotional muscle memory. Or relational muscle memory. Or spiritual muscle memory. Or spending or saving muscle memory. Or political muscle memory

These emotional or relational or spiritual or spending or political muscle pathways and habits that we have practiced over and over and over again

to the point that it's just how we relate or respond REFLEXIVELY and IMMEDIATELY to situations and people around us

David has practiced over and over again the spiritual muscle memory of SEEKING God and he's playing that cord here and now when it matters the most.

And what's dominating his emotional and internal vision and landscape is NOT the problems or armies or threats, although they are there

And his request isn't JUST for rescue, although that's there

What dominates his internal landscape is this sense that if he can just SEE God and find him, he will know REAL rest

And in fact, David talks about this internal dialogue he has with himself, he's fighting to win that internal dialogue so that he might do the right and wise thing:

Hear my voice when I call, LORD;

be merciful to me and answer me.

⁸My heart says of you, "Seek his face!"

Your face, LORD, I will seek.

Here's the battleground for true rest: if you can win the internal dialogue battle to seek God first, you can win the war against restlessness amidst any circumstances, any situation, any job, anything

You might still need to make a change, you might still need to act, David certainly acted, he was a warrior-king.

But that action starts with a deep rootedness in a settled place and it's acting in faith, hope, and love instead of striving, grasping, anxious, bored, frustrated or merely restless

David's heart is calling him to seek the face of God, when there are lots of other voices internally and externally calling him to fight or flight.

So David sets his heart and his path in this seeking after God direction, that's what he's committing to first and foremost, and he closes this song with some words that I think are likely just for a few of you today who need to hear this

For those of you who are feeling a little bit trapped, a little bit restless, and you're thinking about or have already started to take some steps of action that might not be wise or good

That might be taking you down a path that only has pain or darkness or regret waiting for you but for right now it sure feels like it could offer you relief or pleasure or that feeling of being alive again

Hear this strong call from David to you today as he closes his reflections with his enemies and threats STILL all around him:

¹³ I remain confident of this:

***I will see the goodness of the Lord
in the land of the living.***

¹⁴ Wait for the Lord;

***be strong and take heart
and wait for the Lord.***

Read that with me? AGAIN: David talking to himself, this inner dialogue that he's fighting for peace and settledness in the midst of a difficult situation

Here's what happens when we're feeling restless and maybe a little bit stuck, maybe a little bit bored:

there are always bad decisions that are available to us that promise to cheaply and temporarily relieve that restlessness

but in the end cheap and bad decisions will only lead to cheap and bad places.

Cheap and bad decisions always only lead to cheap and bad places: pain, heartache and misery,

And ultimately they lead to disconnection from God who is the source of all peace and they often undermine all the critical relationships and work in our lives that would bless us

And so David here calls us to put a stake in the ground, to be confident in God's good and generous activity

and to WAIT on the Lord, to be strong and take heart and wait on the Lord

This isn't a call to IN-activity, this is a call to WISER activity, to life-giving activity,

David's commitment to seeking and waiting on the Lord is keeping him from rushing into doing something stupid, keeping him from making cheap and bad decisions that would only lead him to cheap and bad places

to SEEK FIRST God's presence even and especially as things get difficult or just dull

And in fact David's most famous fall from grace is when he's a little restless and bored and he makes a famously terrible decision that complicates that restless situation.

But David here is calling us to a step of wisdom that is a variation on a theme that we repeat from time to time around here: ***Do not complicate a restless situation with a bad decision.***

If you're feeling restless at work today and not sure what your options are, these verses are for you today, you should go home and memorize this this week: READ WITH ME:

¹³ I remain confident of this:

***I will see the goodness of the Lord
in the land of the living.***

¹⁴ Wait for the Lord;

***be strong and take heart
and wait for the Lord.***

Do not therefore turn to a little too much alcohol or a little too much food or a few too many pills or find some other addiction to try to quiet the restlessness

That would be complicating a hard situation with a bad decision

Do not start burning bridges all around you at work just because you're a little restless and bored!

Instead, leave here confident of this: you will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

So wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord, press into the Lord, seek the Lord

And that might include applying for other jobs, doing some networking, nudging on some doors and seeing if the Lord might open some things up

But ultimately the Lord is the one that you're seeking and trusting and looking to for peace

Are you feeling restless at home today, in your marriage, with the kids, with the grind, these verses are for you today [READ WITH ME]:

Therefore do NOT complicate your restless situation with a bad decision

A bad decision would be to reach out to an unwise friendship, especially not to reach out for a potential affair partner or some other relationship that you know is toxic for you

That person might be interesting or attractive, and for a brief moment you will break the restlessness of your current life with a cheap and bad decision

But just a few days or a few weeks or a few months down that road you will wake up and realize that you have given away everything that really matters and is really valuable for something that was cheap, easy and temporary and ultimately a colossally stupid decision

Do not complicate a restless situation with a bad decision.

INSTEAD remain confident of this: You WILL see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living, in this life, if you'll wait for the Lord, be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord

Restlessness is an inability to make peace with where you are and what you're doing because you have a sense that something's not RIGHT with where you are and what you're doing and you feel a little stuck

The Christian response to this restlessness of our culture and of our world is actually to agree: ever since sin and death entered into this world, something HASN'T been right with where we are and what we're doing

Humans as a species are a RESTLESS species because we weren't made for sin or death and YET we're stuck in both

We were made to live in unbroken relationship with God and with the people and the world around us and yet broken relationships are everywhere

But the good news of Jesus is that God looked down on a RESTLESS people living in an environment they weren't designed for and yet were incapable of getting out of themselves

And he decided that they would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living through the gift of his Son Jesus

And so he came, lived, and died, and rose again here on earth, in the land of the living to rescue us from these conditions that make us restless.

First he forgives us and reconciles us to God that we might no longer be restless spiritually

And ultimately he promises that it one day all shall be well—everything will be restored.

And in the mean time, when we find ourselves in this restless place where we can't make peace with and we feel a little stuck

Our most natural response to this place is fight or flight—and sometimes EVENTUALLY those ARE the wise decisions we need to make

But David give us another option, a NEW GO-TO, a FIRST RESPONSE BEFORE we do either one of those things

And that is to SEEK. To seek after the Lord, to know his peace and from that settled, rooted place, to then act or not, move or not, but in all of this there's this rich expectation that we will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living

Today's TAKE-WITH'S:

- **How might you start to cultivate spiritual muscle memory around seeking the Lord first?** Even before fight or flight? This happens as you pray regularly, as you read Scripture regularly—PROVERBS 31 DAY CHALLENGE, two days this week so perfectly spoke to me!

As you engage in community with other people who are learning this same habit and practice

I've learned this in part by hanging out in small groups and other places where other people who are more practiced than I am are doing it and I pick it up from them

- **Do not complicate a restless situation with a bad decision.** On any given Sunday there are any number of people who are in this kind of a situation, teetering on the edge or already down that road

This morning there's an opportunity to turn around, go back, or avoid it altogether

And it all starts with seeking the Lord first.