

God is the Base
Rest(less) Week 1: Psalm 127
July 8, 2018

Welcome/intro/vision

Great day to join us, starting a brand new series called Rest(less), notice the “less” is in parenthesis

And that’s because we’re going to talk for the next couple of weeks about the challenges that many of us have with realizing and experiencing real rest

Now if you’re at all like me at first blush you might not think that you have this particular problem

I mean, I love to sleep, and I don’t mean to brag but I’m pretty good at it—if sleeping was a spiritual gift, I think I’d have it

For most of my adult life I’ve had two gears: all-on and all-off. Day is done? Great! Time to sleep! I can go from full-on activity to completely asleep in about 45 seconds or so

Some of you are like me, you can just switch off like that

Others of you, you’ve got this whole wind down routine where you start thinking about thinking about getting to bed

and then you get moving in that direction and then you finally get there but you need to read or do a Sudoku puzzle or knit a sweater or write the next Great American Novel in order to wind down and go to sleep

Some of you literally struggle with physically getting rest into your life, while others of us can just hit the off switch and go to bed

But actually the type of rest that we’re talking about this series isn’t that kind of rest

What we’re going to talk about in this series is this challenge that many of us have where this inner feeling of restlessness follows us, even if we get enough sleep at night

This was illustrated perfectly by someone I was having lunch with the other day who was talking about their fantastic vacation

And as he was describing this trip he took, it sounded wonderful—exotic location at the beach, family was there, the picture of what most Americans dream of when they think about summer vacation

And when I asked him how long they had been away he told me it was a whole week, and by the end of it he got a little stir crazy and he got a little RESTLESS

REST-LESS, even on vacation on the beach where rest was all that was happening.

Any of you ever felt REST-LESS internally even though externally there wasn't all that much pulling at you, you weren't all that crazy busy?

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

Billions and billions and billions of dollars are spent on trips and vacations and fun and games and leisure

And all of that can be good and has its place—AND YET even with all those resources poured into play and leisure and attempting to get away and get recharged

Would anyone say that our culture and our country is a rested place? Are we a people at peace with ourselves and with one another?

Or are we, still, in spite of all that money and all that time devoted to leisure and trips and vacations and pleasure, still an incredibly RESTLESS people?

Maybe that's because RESTLESSNESS at its core is a spiritual problem and not a scheduling problem

There are people who are retired who have all the free time in the world how are restless and there are people who are working 3 jobs who are restless

Restlessness at its core is a problem of the heart and the mind and the soul, and for those of us who are over-scheduled and over-booked, that's just a surface symptom of a much deeper soul issue

And the way that you know that is you can clear the calendar and get away for a week, but you can't get away from it on the inside, can you?

I may have the spiritual gift of sleep, but I'm still fighting to get to the place in my heart and my mind and my soul where I can know the kind of rest that God promises in the Scriptures

And I think that many of us have that same condition. So we're going to spend these next couple of weeks here in mid-summer drilling down into how we might become people who are no long Rest-Less

But who at our core know the rest that God provides and offers us

To start with today we're going to look at Psalm 127, right after Proverbs where we just were for the past 5 weeks: Bible/no Bible

New to the Bible, glad you're here, Psalms is an ancient book of prayers, poetry, and songs written and about 1,000 years before Christ

It's the biggest book in the whole Bible and it is wonderful

Both the Jewish people and Christians for centuries have found that the prayers and songs and poetry in this collection put words around our experiences and our spiritual journeys in pitch-perfect ways

Some of the Psalms have headings that tell us some information or context for the Psalm and we get a heading at the top of Psalm 127 which is helpful for us as we take a look at just the first few verses of **Psalm 127**:

A song of ascents. Of Solomon.

This is important because most of the Psalms as far as we can tell are one-off's that stand alone But Psalm 127 is a part of a sub-collection of 15 psalms called the Psalms or songs of ascents

There were a couple of annual feasts where people from all over Israel would gather to Jerusalem—sort of an annual pilgrimage for those who could afford it or were healthy enough to make the trip

And from what we understand or know, these psalms of ascents were sung together by groups of people who were making their way to Jerusalem

What was literally a city on a hill, they were ascending their way up to Jerusalem, walking or riding on various beasts for days and days together as the feasts and festivals got closer and closer

These were songs intended to help the people traveling to be ready for what they were getting ready to enter into, to help tune their hearts and minds for what was ahead

Not all that unlike how some of us sing Christmas carols to help us engage with and prepare for the celebration of Christmas day

This particular song of ascent was written by Solomon, the same guy who wrote most of the Proverbs that we spent time in the past series

And here's what Solomon writes that speaks into our challenge of restlessness:

***Unless the Lord builds the house,
the builders labor in vain.
Unless the Lord watches over the city,
the guards stand watch in vain.
2 In vain you rise early
and stay up late,
toiling for food to eat—
for he grants sleep to those he loves.***

In the 1940's and 50's a psychologist by the name of Abraham Maslow was working out the idea that each human being had a set of needs and that we could rank them and understand how they fit in relation to one another

And so he built a framework that is still popular today called **Maslow's hierarchy of needs, here it is.**

And the way he built this pyramid was at the bottom was the most basic and important needs we have, he called those *Physiological needs*

And that includes oxygen, which 10/10 doctors agree is important for human life
Water, food, sleep, shelter and those kinds of basics

One layer up he described as *Safety* which he meant as safe from violence or trauma:

- Physical safety
- Emotional security, financial security, health and well-being or access to resources like doctors and hospitals that help us to feel safe and that we can handle accidents or things that might happen to us

Above that was *Love/Belonging*: social contact and connection with family and friendships and a sense of connectedness

Above that *Esteem*: a sense of self-worth and value, that we each matter or are important in some way

And then at the very top of his hierarchy was what he called *Self-Actualization*
and later in life he talked about how this ability to give yourself to something much bigger than yourself allows you to come alive spiritually and emotionally

This framework has its critics, but its proven to be remarkably durable and a helpful rough-sketch of what human beings need in order to not just survive to thrive and be fully alive and fully human

And throughout human history, most human beings have spent most of their time on these bottom couple of layers, just making sure that we've got food and shelter and a safe place to live

Up until really just the past 100-200 years, it was all most humans could do to make sure we had these basic elements in place

In this song of ascents, Solomon addresses all the human effort that goes into some key components of the base of the triangle:

*[Unless the Lord **builds the house,**
the builders labor in vain.
Unless the Lord **watches over the city,**
the guards stand watch in vain.
² In vain you rise early
and stay up late,
toiling for **food to eat**—
for he grants **sleep** to those he loves.]*

Shelter, safety, food, and sleep. You don't get much more basic and essential than these things for human life

And because these things are so vital to our survival, most of human history has been about striving and grasping and clawing for these core things.

But Solomon writes this Psalm of ascents for pilgrims who have left their homes and left their crops and fields to come to Jerusalem to worship and celebrate and participate in the festival that is all about God

And what Solomon says is not that shelter, safety, food and sleep are useless or meaningless, but that there's something deeper and truer and more significant, more important than even those things

And if Solomon had access to Abraham Maslow's hierarchy back in the day, I think he'd look at it and say, "Abe, babe, I think you're on to something. You've really captured some important stuff here."

"But I think there's something that's even deeper than our physiological needs, and you need a new base."

"How about we put God right here at the base of our hierarchy of needs."

Because God is the one who breathes purpose and meaning and life into all the rest of this work therefore, God is the base

The song the pilgrims are singing as they leave behind all their homes and plants and safety and security of being at home

Is that God is more important than those things and is the one who gives those things meaning

*Unless the Lord **builds the house,**
the builders labor in vain.
Unless the Lord **watches over the city,**
the guards stand watch in vain.
² In vain you rise early
and stay up late,*

toiling for food to eat

That doesn't mean you can't build a house unless you're a God-person—in the ancient world you had to build your own house, often with extended family or friends

And it doesn't mean that guards watching over a city can't help sound an alarm if they spot an enemy

in the ancient world, guards stood watch around the clock but especially at night looking for random marauders or intruders or the attack coming from a neighboring nation

And thank goodness that there's many people who toil to make GREAT food to eat!

In the ancient world, of course, this was a reference to the super-time and labor intensive work of farming and agriculture

and the only way to make it really work was to get up early and stay up late, especially at those critical times of planting and harvesting

Toiling, Building, Guarding: None of those are bad things in and of themselves

In fact, last week as we closed out our time in the book of Proverbs, we invited everyone to read through the book of Proverbs together—book marks in the back if you didn't get one last week and want to jump in with us, grab one on the way out

Proverbs is mostly written by this same Solomon who writes this Psalm and if you were reading this past week in Proverbs 6 Solomon writes this wonderful little piece:

Go to the ant, you sluggard;

consider its ways and be wise!

⁷It has no commander,

no overseer or ruler,

⁸yet it stores its provisions in summer

and gathers its food at harvest.

So Solomon LOVES hard work, he's a big fan of hard work

and the work that we're talking about here of toiling or just working, building and guarding, these things aren't bad things at all

But what Solomon does mean is that these things are empty without a larger purpose or meaning

Toiling for food and Building a nice house and making sure the city is safe are MEANS to a larger END

And this song is pushing us to ask the question: what's all this activity FOR? And if God isn't at the center of it, then it's all just going to pass away, it's all just fleeting, it's not anchored in something large enough to

Here in our culture, just like ancient Israel, we spend all this time, energy, and money Toiling, Building, and Guarding—I want to suggest to you that it's one of the primary symptoms of our restlessness

We TOIL to make money so we can purchase or BUILD our houses and then GUARD it by purchasing a security system for the house

until we TOIL some more to make enough money to build or buy a BIGGER house with a BIGGER more complicated security system

But you're not here on this earth to merely toil, build a house and guard a house until you can toil more, build another bigger house and then guard that bigger another house-- what's it all FOR?

We spend all this time toiling to build communities and neighborhoods and organizations, neighborhoods, cities, towns, states, and NATIONS

And then we toil all the more, spending all this time, energy, and money GUARDING our cities and towns and states and nations

But we're not here merely to toil, build and guard a neighborhood or a city or a state or even a nation: what's it all FOR??

You can do it, but what's it leading to? Where is it all going? Why are we doing it?

Toiling, Building and Guarding—these are primary CHURN, the surface expressions of our restlessness:

Toiling, Building and Guarding houses or cities or reputations or careers or our money or our reputations or our kids or, or, or, or

Let's do a deeper pass on this—when or how does Working, Building, and Guarding become Restless? **[Restless Working, Building, Guarding]**

When it's being forced to fill a void in us it wasn't designed to fill

- **Identity Marker:** I'm a teacher/tech guy/engineer/consultant/construction worker/small business owner/stay-at-home parent who works hard at an important job

THEREFORE I'm good/valuable/lovable/justified because I work hard and I'm building something important AND because I depend on this to feel good about who I am, you better believe I'm going to guard it with my life.

If you're whole sense of well-being is dependent on your work or what you're building, you'll never really be able to rest because your validation and sense of worth in your life is built around your working, building, and guarding. That's a recipe for a restless life

- **Security:** how do I know that I'm safe and will be okay in an unstable, insecure world? I've got this job, this big house, this nest egg of money that I've stored up. So I'm toiling

and building and guarding like an obsessed human being in order to make sure that I'm going to be okay.

- **Still Playing Tag:** A movie came out this past spring called Tag based on a real-life story about some dudes who have been playing a game of tag in various iterations with different rules for almost 30 years since they met in college

Some of us have been playing a game of success tag with high school or college friends for decades.

And as long as your working, building, and guarding are all about keeping up with the people around you, you're going to be and remain restless, restless, restless, because there's always a really good chance someone else RIGHT NOW is working on getting their next big break and leave you behind yet again.

- **Fighting Voices of Old Demons:** Once heard a story of a woman who grew up in a home where her mother constantly told her she'd never do anything of worth or significance in this world

Actually, she was extremely gifted and she finished school and started a brand new startup that really took off but as it got momentum she totally over-reached: huge buildings, over-hired, huge debt, eventually the company went bankrupt

But she was brilliant and clearly had gifts, so she landed as CEO of another firm. Got it going in a great direction but did it again: over-reached, huge buildings, over-staffed, huge debt, board fired her before it went bankrupt

Hired again: over-reached, huge buildings, over-staffed, huge debt, board fired her again—only this time someone cared enough about her to ask the question: “you've done this 3 times now—why do you keep making the same mistakes? What are you trying to prove? Why are you doing this?”

Y'all are smart people, who was she trying to impress? Whose love was she trying to earn? Whose voices was she trying to disprove but gave them way too much power over her?

Old demons will make you utterly restless. If those are the voices that are driving you to working or toiling, building, and guarding, you'll never find real rest

- **Atone for Past Sins:** some of us have blown it in the past in some big or small ways and we know it. And in our heads we've got this deficit and for some of us in a moment of clarity and genuine heart-felt desire to make a change, we decide to atone for what we've done in the past by stacking up a bunch of good deeds, a bunch of good works.

This is a wonderful impulse, but there's a basic math problem to it: if you've wounded or hurt someone or a group of someones in your past, when have you done enough good stuff NOW to pay that debt off?

There is tremendous value in coming to terms with what we've done in the past, apologizing for it, making amends, and even making a major change in our life trajectory towards more of a contributing, serving kind of a lifestyle or even career.

But if at the root of all of that is this nagging sense of guilt, you'll never do enough to pay back that debt and silence that voice—it'll persist in leaving you restless

Identity, Security, Tag, Old Demons, Atoning for Past Sins

God at the base answers all of these voices with a better solution that frees us to work, build and guard in faith hope and love.

Running each of these needs, questions, doubts, desires through the grid of God at the base of our lives FIRST roots us to live more resilient, more full, more life-giving lives

You want an identity marker that's clear—to know that you're justified and lovable and significant and worthwhile?

God declares over you that you're made in his image. And the Jesus story is that you are so valuable and so loved that God sent his son to redeem you, to purchase you back from slavery to sin and death

So that you might once again be a son or a daughter of the most high God—an identity that is not based on temporary and fragile external props and artificial constructions that are easily toppled

But an identity that is as eternal as God himself is, rooted in forever love, that can never be taken away from you

You want security: the Biblical story is that God has sent his Son to secure an eternal inheritance for you and he himself promises to always, always, always be with you and never forsake you

He leaves the security of heaven for us so that we might share in his security forever

You still playing tag? That's rooted in this desire we all have to want validation and affirmation and ultimately to be blessed by someone or something outside of ourselves

You can get a cheap and flimsy and temporary version of that by competing against other people and occasionally winning

Or you can be set free from wasting all that time and energy looking at everyone else by doing what the Scriptures call us to do:

Fix our eyes on God, especially Jesus, the one who is the author and perfecter of our faith, the one who saves us

We fix our eyes on God and we run OUR race for an audience of one, him and him alone.

When you're swimming a race and you take the time to look up and look at the lanes beside you, you know what happens? You slow down.

When you're running the race that God has marked out for you to run and you look up around you to see what everyone else is doing and what they're getting you know what happens? You slow down

Fixing our eyes on God at the base to answer those questions and longings for validation and affirmation sets us free to go to work without obsessively checking everyone else's Facebook status to make sure they're not getting further along than we are

We can genuinely bless our neighbor in their good fortunes (and not be secretly jealous) and we can be genuinely sad in their mis-fortunes (and not be secretly glad) when our eyes are fixed on God and running the race that he has set out before us

Do you have the voices of old demons that are driving the decisions you're making? Do you have recordings that play over and over and over in your head, the voices that you're determined to DISprove

Maybe from a parent, maybe someone who you haven't seen in decades who said something to you forever ago and they don't even remember it but you've been nursing that and trying to prove them wrong forever, giving them so much power of you! They might even be dead and they're still haunting you.

Jesus is the master at driving out demons and replacing them with a new spirit, new energy, new power, new life. Jesus cast out demons all the time when he was here, he had no trouble with them at all

And he's glad to give you new voices to replace old ones that are driving you restless

And finally, if you want to atone for past sins, there is one who has already atoned for you. And there's nothing you can do or need to do to add to his perfect sacrifice

And so you can either attempt to repay the debt that's already been paid for you motivated by guilt and obligation

or you can receive the gift of repayment already made by Christ, let that transform your heart so that YES, you live a life of serving others, but in Christ you are free to then serve out of grace not guilt, out of joy not obligation, from a place of strength and not a sense of crushing deficit

At every turn, if we will take the things we mistakenly go looking for from our work and instead run them through God at the base it frees us to be at rest and at peace in our hearts even as we work.

Because Biblically the opposite of rest isn't work but restlessness.

Solomon writes this psalm for these traveling pilgrims to orient them to the essential nature of what they are traveling to Jerusalem to do

They are coming to Jerusalem to worship. And because God is at the base, this trip for worship isn't just a vacation and it's not a waste of time or a distraction from the main thing

They are leaving behind shelter and security of home and the work back in the fields
BUT unless the Lord builds the house or guards the city or provides food, all of that work is empty and meaningless and useless

And if we cannot live our lives from that base then our working will eventually become a RESTLESS working
even if we sprinkle in a few nice vacations in there along the way, because we have missed the point of all of it altogether

And so this morning as we start this journey of digging into our restless hearts and getting to a place that is deeper, more rooted, and more settled

I want to invite you to do a little internal assessment and take the temperature

The **TAKE-WITH Exercise** is this:

Where do you find yourself operating from restlessness?

In what contexts or areas does restlessness stir in your soul, in your heart, in your mind?

Toiling/working, Building, Guarding: your relationships, your career, your retirement, your vacations—where is restlessness hijacking your heart?

Why: Identity? Security? Playing Tag? Voices of Old Demons? Atoning for Sins? Other?

If you're building your identity around your toiling, building, guarding, your going to have a restless energy that can't stop

If you're building your sense of security and safety in a broken world primarily around working more, building bigger, and guarding it intently, you're going to live a restless life

If you're constantly trying to keep up with someone or someones around you, you'll never know real rest, they'll be a constant threat

If you've got old voices and demons that follow you around driving you to try to prove them wrong like slavemasters, it's going to be impossible to rest

If you're trying to work off some debt, atone for some mistake, there's an atonement already offered that offers you a deeper heart change and a better energy to than guilt or obligation to go and change the world with

There might be other sources that you discover as you take inventory, these are the main ones that I see as I talk with people

There is EVEN a holy restlessness that God sometimes uses to get us moving. Before I took this job, I was restless in my old job—that restlessness was opening me up to consider a big move for me in terms of my job trajectory

So there was some good restlessness that God was using

but even within that there were causes and sources and reasons for my restlessness that God was surfacing for me to address:

some identity issues he needed to clean up BEFORE I came here so I'd have less baggage and fewer issues coming into this new work

Last step: How would having God as the base of your life re-shape the why behind your restlessness?

If you can name the core driver of your restlessness, then maybe you can begin to run that through the lens of God, the work of God, the purposes of God, the love of God

And if we can get our hearts and minds around that, if we can put God at the base, he might start to free us to live lives that are less rest(less) and instead allow our hearts to be at rest

While he transforms us into men and women after his own heart, who do incredible work, GREAT work: working, building, and even guarding, in faith, hope and love; full of wisdom and courage

Not striving, not restless, not anxious, not TOILING in a negative way

But good work, work that God has gone ahead of us and prepared in advance for us to do

And if we're willing to answer these 3 questions, we can not only DO that work, we can do it IN THE WAY GOD made for us to do it

Not merely producing great outcomes like houses built, cities guarded, and making great food eat

but becoming GREAT PEOPLE, full of the Spirit, full of joy, full of the power of the Spirit, at peace with God, with ourselves, and the world around us.

And Solomon the Psalmist is calling you and I to step back from all this Toiling, Building and Guarding

And to ask bigger questions, deeper questions, and to see that underneath all of that activity is something more core, more primal, more essential that re-frames all that activity into larger purpose and a larger meaning

Our English word telescope comes from a Greek word 'telos' which means ends, goals, purpose

The telescope is the tool that you use to see something more important, far off, the goal or the purpose or the end of the telescope isn't the telescope itself but what you can see through it

And so Solomon writes that if we're obsessed with the telescope of houses and cities and toiling for food

And we miss that God's the one that all these things when working rightly should point us to, then we've missed the whole point entirely

George MacDonald wrote this in the 1800's:

In whatever a man attempts without God he must fail miserably--or succeed more miserably.

I had a conversation a couple of weeks ago with a woman who described her re-engagement with faith at the end of a long time away where life was working fine

She was doing great, especially at work, and she kept getting promotions and was being recognized

But then some things went sideways with some of the other VP's she was working with, they shunted her into the Siberia of their organization

And as she settled in on that first day into a job she did not want and a position that she was dreading, she surrendered it all to God

And that was the turning point in her spiritual journey

These are the kinds of stories I hear all the time:

life apart from God was succeeding well enough to allow someone to continue to carry on apart from any serious engagement with the spiritual life

And then something miserable happens in the career or the family that makes them reconsider the role of faith or spirituality in their lives

They succeeded miserably for years, maybe decades—and all that success kept them moving further and further away from God or at least kept God and the questions of God at a distance

And then God in his grace allows them to fail miserably—this is some old theologians called ‘a severe mercy’

A severe mercy that actually woke them up to larger realities that they’d been fending off for many, many years

About the year 400, there was a man named Augustine who spent his whole life building a career and trying out all these different philosophies and spiritualities

Finally he meets Jesus and he wrote this prayer describing his quest: ***“You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.”***

“In the Bible, the opposite of rest isn’t work, it’s restlessness.”

7 great life works?