

Re-Evaluating Our Rhythms
Rest(less) Week Four: July 29, 2018

Welcome/intro/vision: been great to be back in PBO last week and this week

Our last week in a series called Rest(less)

Been 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

needed to move on from that job or from that dating relationship or that situation

But as I'm talking with people over this series 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

If you're new, we're so glad you're here

let me get you up to speed on where we've been because we'll be building on that today

Here's a definition of restlessness that I've been working with

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

So restlessness on the surface seems to be largely the result of our situation and circumstances

But what we've been saying is that mixed in with that SITUATIONAL restlessness, which is real, there are deeper CORE issues of what really makes us restless

And if we do not deal with that core spiritual component, we're 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 on the job or on vacation. You can be restless when you're single, you can be restless in your marriage

You can be restless with little kids at home or with NO kids at home.

Restlessness SEEMS to be situational and CERTAINLY there are often situational components but at the core of it restlessness is a spiritual, not situational problem

What we want to do is get to the spiritual heart of our restlessness because if we don't deal with our restless spirits, we're just going to bring the same restlessness with us into that next setting

And very often when we live restless lives we make restless decisions that we very often regret

Last week we talked about how early on in God's relationship with humanity God built in a weekly hard stop into the weekly rhythms of life in Israel so that they might address the physical and spiritual root of our restlessness

Right in the middle of the ten commandments God tells his people to take a day a week off from work so that they might worship and rest:

⁸ "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a sabbath 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.

-Exodus 20

And we talked about how all of us are a bit like tomato plants: we need some scaffolding and structure around us to be healthy adults

And in this command, God is putting in place a scaffolding to help his people to live long, healthy, emotionally and physically and spiritually fully mature lives

God lives in deep time and in deep rest. He is active in this world and he is always at work in the world, but in him there is an eternal REST

In this command, God is inviting them and us to participate in his perfect rest, to be renewed by it, to dedicate one day a week to the rhythm of God's perfect eternal rest

Because at the core of it, restlessness is a spiritual issue, not a situational issue, and God wants to quiet the restlessness that's in our hearts

Today we're going to fast forward from this commandment that was given to the people of Israel a couple thousand years before Christ

To a time when Jesus and the religious leaders had a run-in and a bit of a spat over how this commandment was to be lived out

And today what we're going to see is this sobering truth: ***there is nothing so good that humans have not found a way to corrupt or distort or mis-use.***

You see this everywhere: money, power, sex, relationships, words, religion, government, marriage

All originally and potentially good things that could be WONDERFUL things if used rightly

but of course we see how people have consistently found ways to exploit, corrupt, distort and mis-use these wonderful gifts

Conversations with people who are cynical about religion point out how many terrible things throughout history done in the name of religion and I TOTALLY agree!

there is nothing so good that it is impervious to the human ability to corrupt, distort or mis-use

And today we're going to see how that gift of Sabbath, a day-long siesta of physical and spiritual renewal to restore and quiet our restless hearts, got hijacked and distorted along the way

And we're going to see how Jesus is going to push back against the distortion and call all of us into the original intent of the command and back to the gift

Bible/no Bible/Mark 2: one of the four biographies of Jesus telling the story of who he was, what he did

and at this point we're early on in Jesus's ministry work as a traveling teacher and miracle-worker with his twelve disciples

and there's already been a few light conflicts with the religious authorities when we get this account:

²³ One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. ²⁴ The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?"

Remember what the original commandment said? Nobody works! Not you or your sons or daughters or ox or donkey or guard dog or pet hamster or the servants

Everyone is to rest!

But the commandment stirred up some questions: what exactly did it mean that nobody was to do work?

What counted as work? Could you build a fire? Cook a meal? Throw the football with your kid? Could you pull your goat out of a well if they fell in or did she need to stay in there til the morning?

All these questions swirled around this command. So what the Pharisees had done is they'd developed a ton of very specific sub-rules to nail down EXACTLY what was permissible and what wasn't

There were 39 CATEGORIES of activities explicitly listed as forbidden—39! You can Google them, Orthodox Jews still live this way: Carrying, burning, tanning, reaping, harvesting

So those are the categories, then you've got to figure out what counts—so in the category of BURNING, an automobile runs by burning gas, so that's prohibited on the Sabbath.

Not talking about cars in Jesus's day, but this was the kind of thing being hashed out constantly

Over time, all these rules and all these accretions got piled on and piled onto this day
until the day that was SUPPOSED to be a gift to the people was turned into a burden,
onerous and heavy and exhausting

And what Sabbath had become by the time of Jesus was a badge of what it meant to be a good Jew, a real Jew

If you were really a good Jew, you didn't do any of the 39 things listed on the prohibited list, it was a badge or a marker of whether you were really in or if you were really out

And this propensity to set out these really particular badges of belonging where you get judged to be in or out is a CONSTANT issue in religious circles

and something that Jesus was CONSTANTLY pushing back against

We just finished a 5-week Exploring Christianity seminar for people who are exploring faith or coming back to faith and this was a major conversation topic that we kept coming back to because it's so pervasive

By the way, if you missed that one, there's another one launching at the YMCA on Sunday nights in a couple of weeks, come join us details in the bulletin

This idea that we have to figure out who's really in or out, we'll call this **Closed Set mentality** and in this instance looks like this: **here's the Jewish star**, and here's the borders around it

And you're either In or Your Out, you're either a real Jew or you're not

How do you know? **by outward behavior**—do you worship in the temple or synagogue? Do you fast regularly enough? Observe the sabbath? All the right sacrifices? do you check all the right boxes?

The Pharisees complain all the time to Jesus that Jesus and his disciples do not check all the right boxes around the border of what they have decided is a good Jew:

they don't observe the Sabbath they way they've defined sabbath, they don't fast enough, and they definitely hang out with all the wrong people

Therefore, they aren't REAL Jews, they aren't "IN"—because being "IN" always requires that we check all the right boxes and do all the right OBSERVABLE behaviors because those are the badges of belonging

AND there are always gatekeepers ready to tell everyone if they're doing it right and doing it well enough to be counted as in

Let's swap out the Jewish star for the Christian cross and fast forward to today and especially here in the South there are all kinds of church communities who operate in this exact same closed-set mentality

You're either a Christian or you're not, and here's how we know: you do or don't do all the behaviors that we say matter most

My grandparents were old-school Southern Baptists—you didn't drink, dance, smoke, or go to movies—those were the dividing lines, the badges of whether you were in or out as a Christian

Some of you have been a part of churches like that—

they're very often full of earnest religious people who are trying their best and are often very exhausted by the heaviness of all the rules that are talked about ALL THE TIME because these are the things that really matter, this is how we know if you're in or out—EVERYONE's miserable in this picture!

Creates this wonderful little problem called **Tribalism**: here are my people, here's how we know who we are, and here's who we get to throw rocks at—everyone outside our box!

What you see with Jesus is he pushes back against Closed Set mentality over and over and over again. He doesn't disagree with the law or the rules, he actually adheres and blesses and participates in the rules

He loves the law, he calls people to embrace it

But how the laws and rules work in the Jesus way play a much different role

What we see with Jesus is an **Open-Set Mentality**

Jesus is at the center, and there are **all these people in orbit around Jesus**, and they start out in different places

The **religious leaders** would seem to start out very close to Jesus, but when they come in contact with him over and over and over again **they move AWAY** from Jesus

Meanwhile throughout Jesus's life there are these **NON-Religious people: tax collectors and prostitutes and outcasts** who would seem to start way out here but when they meet Jesus over and over and over again, **they're moving towards him**

In the open-set mentality, it's not about who's in or out, it's about trajectory and what direction you're headed in

And this trajectory is never done, never finished. We're all the time moving either towards Jesus or away from Jesus, sometimes just in a holding pattern even

In my own life **I was moving towards Jesus** in high school and college but then I met a **cute girl and I** decided I wanted her at the center of my life instead of God, so my trajectory was towards her

And then that whole thing came crashing down around me and I realized it was stupid to put a girl at the center of my life and **I turned back towards Jesus**

Later in my life I've regularly chased various pictures of **success** in place of Jesus, and I've regularly had to keep going back to Jesus over and over and over again

This is the picture we get of the Christian life from Jesus himself and from the writers of the New Testament—the rules matter, obeying the commands of the Bible, that matters, that's an expression of which direction you're headed in

But ultimately we're not here to judge who's in or out, that's not the church's job
we're all here to be on a trajectory of growing in Christ, following Christ wherever he leads, wherever he takes us to the ends of the earth! and to encourage everyone else who's in community with us to be on the same trajectory

If you're not a religious person, it should be of great comfort and encouragement to you that all it was the non-religious people who were constantly drawn to Christ

And for those of us who ARE religious people, we need to be very sobered by the stark reality that it was the religious people who had MORE obstacles to genuine response to Jesus, not less

Now all of this matters for all sorts of reasons but as we're talking about restlessness let's drill down into that:

Closed Set Mentality is a recipe for **religious restlessness**.

You are constantly working, constantly vigilant—and if you're good at checking all the boxes? it leads to self-righteousness and pride

and if you struggle with checking all the boxes? and doing everything right it leads to exhaustion and despair.

Either way, there is no rest here. A proud and self-righteous heart is not at peace with God or with herself or with the people around them

and an exhausted or despairing heart is not at peace with God or herself or the people around her

What's heartbreaking about that is that if you're sitting in a closed-set mentality space, the gift of real rest is right there with you, Christ is the source of all perfect rest

BUT EYES NOT FIXED ON CHRIST! Eyes fixed on the rules! we're so busy worrying about the stuff on the outside we don't have the attention to pay to the One who is the center of it all and who invites us into that real rest for our souls

If rest could have come through the rules, Jesus wouldn't have had to come!

The **Open-Set mentality** is an invitation to the Rest that God invites us into as we fix our hearts and eyes on Christ, the source of all true rest.

There is work to be done, for sure, but that work happens in response to grace, it happens in an environment of grace, the work WE do is preceded by what God has done first and for us

And we are at peace with the very real fact that all of us are always works in progress, we're able to receive that grace from God without using grace as an excuse to go on sinning

This morning, there's an invitation to all of us into the REST of Jesus that for some of us will require a different picture of what it means to be a Christian

If you're not a religious person or person of faith, the invitation is to hear about the love of Christ and turn towards him, not away, no matter how far away you might think you are from Him or his love

And if you ARE a religious person, the invitation is to hear about the love of Christ and keep moving towards him, continuously growing up in him

AND to not sink into this closed-set mentality but to help us as a church to cultivate an Open-Set mentality

where EVERYONE is invited to come and see what God has done for us in Jesus and ALL OF US are works in progress

[BACK TO MARK 2] The Pharisees were not a community of religious leaders who were settled or at peace with themselves, with God, or the people around them. They were stuck in religious restlessness

They were too busy setting up the box around their closed-set mentality, constantly anxious and vigilant and guarding for threats and who was in and who was out

Jesus was eager to free them from this mentality, to invite them into a different way of thinking, which is why he responds to them the way that he does:

²⁵ He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? ²⁶ In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions."

ESPN several years ago ran an ad campaign that started with two dudes talking and one guy says to the other "Did you see the game last night?"

To which the other guy responds with great indignation: "What do you mean 'did I see the game last night?' Are you questioning my Fanhood?"

And the tag-line was "don't ever let them question your fanhood!" and of course the only way to do that was to be sure to watch every game on ESPN!

Jesus here opens with a rough equivalent of questioning the Pharisees Scriptural fanhood : **"Have you never read** the story of David?"

The Pharisees prided themselves on being the religious people who were the most devoted to the stories of their Scriptures

Their response to Jesus's opening sentence would have been self-righteous indignation: "of COURSE we've read and know the story of David!"

If you don't know the story of David, David was the greatest king in Israel's history the George Washington of the history of Israel, the founding father and everyone was hoping for another one like him to appear soon

But he spent many years running and hiding from his enemies before he became king and at one point he's hiding out in the temple and he and his men are hungry

So they take this super-sacred and holy bread that had already been consecrated to God and was ONLY allowable for the priests to eat and he ate it himself, he wasn't a priest

AND on top of that he gave it to his men who were mostly earthy, gritty, smelly outdoorsy guys who probably all needed a really good shower with lots and lots of soap before they should have even come INTO the temple, much less eaten the sacred bread

What David did was WAY worse than what the disciples are doing as they walk through the fields and pluck some grain and eat it

Jesus here is pulling up a story that they all know and are familiar with and calling them to re-think their closed-set mentality

They thought be a good Jew meant that you checked all the right boxes, including not trespassing the sacred bread

But none of them would dare to say that the greatest king in Jewish history wasn't really a good Jew!

So he leads them into this innate tension between the greatest Jewish king in history and all of their heroes

And their attitude towards the rules and the law and how they're mis-using and abusing the law as a bully club to beat people over the head with

Then he closes this little interaction with this statement:

27 Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. 28 So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

Have you ever noticed that it's really easy to get so caught up in a good thing that you end up mistakenly making it the ultimate thing?

I really like my work and my work is a good thing, but it's not an ultimate thing. There are more important things that need to stay at the center

I really like people and people are a good thing, but they're not ultimate things. There are more important things that need to stay at the center

I really like watching football and especially Carolina basketball—doesn't everybody?? Those are good things, even GREAT things, but none of them are ultimate things

One commentary I read said that some ancient rabbis really believed that purpose of humans and why we were created was to keep and observe the sabbath

That sabbath was the main thing and humanity was created to attend to sabbath and observe and keep it and honor it

Jesus here is telling them that they've made the classic mistake of a good thing and turned it into an ultimate thing

And he's inviting them very graciously to quit it

That whole day of sabbath rest was created serve and bless humans. Human beings are made in God's image, the crown of all that God has created and made

And he gifted us human beings with this wonderful little gift of a day of physical and spiritual rest to quiet our restless hearts

And what the religious leaders had done was take this gift that was intended to refuel us and turn it into a burden, into an intolerable, crushing list of rules that kept them from experiencing the true freedom of Christ

He calls them out on this, and then he takes it one step further: he says that God made humans first, and then he invited them into sabbath to serve their flourishing and growth

And since Jesus is the one called "**The Son of Man**" he has the authority over this holy day and therefore he has the power to re-claim it for what it was truly originally meant to be

The title "Son of Man" is an ancient title based on a prophecy from out of the Old Testament book of Daniel

that one who was called "The Son of Man" would be like the firstborn over all humanity and that the Son of Man would one day come and establish a kingdom that would never, ever end

It was one of Jesus's favorite titles for himself. He was the king who had come to establish the un-ending Kingdom of God here amidst all the brokenness and restlessness and sin

And everywhere Jesus went he was doing this reclamation and restoration project

When you restore an old house or an old car, you're taking something that's broken down and returning it to its former and original glory

Jesus has come to do this with the whole world—the world was originally created good, good, good and very good

But a parasite called sin had entered in and corrupted it and so there's a need for this ginormous, eternal restoration project—**Jesus was sent to RESTORE** this place to its original glory

And right in the center of this word 'restoration' is the word '**rest.**' Jesus has come to a restless humanity, corrupted and distressed by pride and conflict and pettiness and gossip and ambition

And he has come to RESTORE US into the men and women we were intended to be in the first place: BE STILL! Be full of courage and wisdom, beauty and strength, operating in faith, hope, and love rather than anxiety or fear or striving or self-protection

And ultimately he has come to invite us into the perfect, eternal, deep rest of God and to build communities of people who are at peace with God and with one another

And because the picture is **less of a closed-set mindset** and more of an open-set mindset, that means it's not about a static, frozen picture of in or out

But **more about our trajectories and movements**. We're constantly in motion spiritually and emotionally and relationally, either entering into the restoration work of Jesus in our own lives or moving away

And so what that means is that we need to regularly check our activities and behaviors and rhythms to make sure that they're still serving this ultimate goal

Because what happens to many of us is we find something that works for us: a work rhythm or a play rhythm or a religious rhythm and it's working for us for a while

But there's always this tendency for to find something that works and stick by it way beyond it's usefulness

The goal is to find rhythms of work and rest and spiritual practices and relationships that contribute to the most important goal of drawing nearer and nearer to Christ over the course of our lives

To find the REST of God as we participate in Jesus's RESTORATION project

But every so often we end up stuck just like the Pharisees in some rhythm or practices that maybe served that work at one time but have now outlived their usefulness

And so we occasionally over the course of our lives we have to "up-periscope" to ask the question "what's working and what's not working" right now

towards that goal of healthy rhythms of work and rest and spiritual practices that help us to draw nearer to Christ to find the rest of God as we participate in Jesus's RESToration project

So today's **TAKE-WITH**

Are your current rhythms of work, rest, relationships, and spiritual practices contributing to the goal of drawing near to Christ to find the rest of God as we participate in Jesus's restoration project?

August is right around the corner. What would it take to go into August and into fall 2018 able to answer YES to this question?

Can you imagine how much healthier and more alive you'd be if you took out some rhythms and patterns in your life that were driving all this internal churn and restlessness?

This week, I want to invite you into an open-set mentality that says, "I'm going to take some thought time this week and evaluate my work, rest, relationships and spiritual practices

And I'm going to do whatever is in my power to discard anything that's keeping me from moving closer to Christ and the rest that he offers me as a part of his great restoration project