

Rhythms of Rest

Rest(less) Week Three: July 22, 2018

Welcome/intro/vision: so glad to be back in PBO!

Week three in a 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

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

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 definition of restlessness that I've been working with this week—most normal people like dictionary definitions but I like to just make up definitions for our purposes and kind of kick it around to see if it works

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—OVER-working or UNDER-working

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'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—to slow down, receive the grace and love God has for us so 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.

I was recently on a driving trip with some extended family and I'm no doctor, but I'm pretty sure that one of the members of my extended family suffers from small bladder syndrome—anyone out there know someone who has small bladder syndrome?

From the earliest stories of her childhood, she has always had to make twice the number of bathroom stops as anyone else

And so when you're planning a driving trip with this woman, you always build in more stops for the bathroom—extra pit-stops, it's just part the deal!

Not all humans suffer from small bladder syndrome, but most of us suffer from small rest syndrome—we get restless quickly and easily AND we don't always realize the spiritual roots of restlessness

But the Scriptures tell us that God KNOWS about our restless condition and yet he really, really wants to travel with us.

So what we see early on in God's relationship with humanity, as he's laying out the roadmap for our travel journeys with himself

Is that God builds in regular pit stops along the way to help us relieve our innate tendencies towards restlessness

And this gift of a rhythm of regularly scheduled pit stops is the invitation from God for you and I to quiet our restlessness, be fueled up for the path and work he's given us to do

We're going to look at a couple of different passages in the Scriptures today

and if you're new to the Bible or to church so glad you're here, let me set the stage

We're looking at the very beginning of the Bible, with the story of the founding of the nation of Israel

It starts with one big family with twelve brothers who all flee to Egypt during a time of famine across the Middle East because Egypt was the one place where there was food

That whole generation dies but the families remain there and grow and grow and grow until the Egyptians get scared of their numbers

And they enslave every one of the Israelites for a couple HUNDRED years until God hears their cries

and God raises up a man named Moses to go to Pharaoh King of Egypt and Moses tells him to let God's people go

Pharaoh says "no thanks! I like having slaves to build my pyramids and make my coffee and sort through my email inbox!"

So God sends a series of plagues on Egypt until finally Pharaoh and all Egypt says "Get out of here!"

So Moses is leading a crew of a several hundred thousand people across the desert towards the land God promised them

but they've been a slave nation for a long, long time, they have no idea what it means to be a people who aren't under the thumb of Egypt

And it is as they are making their way from Egypt to the promised land that Moses and probably his scribes are writing the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy

And midway through Exodus, after the dramatic stories of Moses's head-to-head with Pharaoh and as this whole nation of people is walking through the desert, we get the 10 Commandments

And in the middle of these commandments, as God is laying out the roadmap for what it will look like for God to travel with the people and for the people to travel with God

we get this built-in pit stop that God knows we'll need in order to travel well with him

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. ¹¹ For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

-Exodus 20

A number of years ago I was feeling like I was in a rut of regular and routine parenting failures—probably never happened to others of you who are parents, you can just use your imaginations and pray for me

But I was in this rut so I found a good book to help me get a little better traction on what I was doing

There’s this GREAT book on the book shelf in the back called Boundaries, I recommend it probably more than any other book, it’s all about how to have healthy relationships with people and work and tasks, all of it

It was so wildly popular that they spun off a series of other books all about Boundaries: Boundaries in Dating, Boundaries in Marriage, and yes, Boundaries with Kids—so I read that

And one of the insights that they had is that growing emotionally healthy kids is like growing healthy tomato plants, they need the right amount of scaffolding around them to grow straight up

Too much scaffolding and they’re stunted and warped, but too little and they just sprawl all over the place

And when kids have healthy scaffolding around them as kids they slowly over time learn healthy rhythms and boundaries and relationships from the OUTSIDE in

In a healthy family environment, kids are participating in healthy life rhythms and see and watch and learn how to say yes and no in terms of commitments made and followed through on

And in this environment kids learn how to relate in a healthy manner to everyone from family members to the cashier at the grocery store to friends and acquaintances and extended family

And as they see and experience healthy life rhythms in their family of origin, they gradually INTERNALIZE those rhythms and boundaries

And in an ideal scenario they’d grow up to be adults who have the ability to have healthy rhythms, healthy relationships, the ability to appropriately say yes or no and to follow-through on their commitments

Of course, none of us HAVE that perfect family and even if we did, in our own imperfection we'd continue to struggle with healthy rhythms and healthy relationships

And so we continually need to have a healthy amount of EXTERNAL structure in our lives

Example: in my small group this past year--almost all of us had made New Year's resolution commitments towards regular exercise but then failed to follow-through

And the ones who have managed to finally deliver on their commitment have done so as they've submitted themselves to the external structure of a gym membership or a personal trainer or some corporate exercise group classes

That EXTERNAL structure that helps where our internal ability to be who we want to be or do what we in our best moments want to do

As the people of Israel are fleeing Egypt and are becoming a nation for the first time, they are a like newborn kids

These people have no written Scriptures, just lots of stories from their ancestors about who this God is that just sent plague upon plague upon the Egyptians and just did amazing miracles to set them free from slavery

They don't know God and they don't know how to be a nation and in fact everyone on this road trip through the desert was a slave and their parents and their parents were also slaves

So they don't know anything about how to actually be a self-governing people

But God knows all of this, so he's giving them a very succinct summary of what it means to be his people in these 10 commandments

And right here at commandment number four, God is dealing with our small rest bladder problem we talked about earlier

He knows that we're quickly and easily restless—AND he knows that at the heart of restlessness is not a situational problem but a spiritual problem

So as God is mapping out the rhythms of life for this former slave nation as they make the turn to becoming a nation themselves, he's building in this great gift of a spiritual pit stop every seven days

Sabbath rest. A weekly time to refuel, to worship, to re-center, to have rest for our restless souls

This is the weekly scaffolding that God is putting up around the nation as a way to safeguard and nurture their hearts and to invite them further up and further into their engagement with the Lord their God

It's to be a holy day, a set-apart day. And here as God is introducing the whole idea of Sabbath and what it is and why God is putting this in place, the WHY is all about what happened in the very beginning

Back in Genesis, which Moses also wrote, there's the creation account—how God made everything and it's broken up into 7 days: first day God did x, second day God created y, etc.

And there's been lots of discussions over the centuries about what's happening with that creation account

is it poetry, is it literal, what are the other competing creation stories floating around in the ancient world and how does it compare, some day we'll get into all of that

But regardless, the creation account ends with God resting on the seventh day and here in this passage that's the grounds for the WHY for the people to celebrate and remember the sabbath day:

God rested on the seventh day, we're going to rest, too.

Now in the original creation account, Jewish and Christian Bible nerds for centuries have noted something that's different about that 7th day of creation—let's take a look

In Genesis chapter 1, very first chapter in the Bible, here's how the other 6 days get described:

God creates stuff and THEN here's what it says:

⁵And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day...

And THEN God creates MORE stuff and THEN here's what it says:

⁸And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day...

And it goes on: God creates more stuff on the 3rd day and then it closes up with:

¹³And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day...

¹⁹And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day...

²³And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day...

³¹And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

Okay, so that's the first six days of the creation account, all the work that God did to make all that is and that we see

Now we're going to play the old Sesame Street game: one of these things is not like the other, here's the description of the seventh day that the commandment to take a sabbath is drawing from:

²By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. ³Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

So what's missing? No morning and especially no evening! God's day of rest NEVER, EVER, EVER ends

And from this break in the creation account rhythm there springs up this whole line of thought
That there's an eternal rest of God that we might finally find our rest in

God is never restless. He is never bored or over-worked. He is always perfectly at rest with himself and with how he relates to all that he has created, including all of us here in this world
[Insert commandment here]

And as the people of Israel are establishing a brand new nation crafted deliberately for them to be his people and him to be their God

God is inviting them one day a week to participate in his perfect rest, to enter in, to taste it, to be renewed by it, to dedicate one day a week to the rhythm of God's perfect eternal rest

The people of Israel are given a wonderful gift: weekly access into the perfect rest of God that quiets all the unhealthy spiritual sources of our restlessness

This rhythm was to define their week, the day of rest was what the whole week was leading up to

And their participation in the deep and perfectly at-rest God was the fuel that sent them into the work they would then do for the next six days

I spent 3 years in Spain as a kid: seventh, eighth, ninth grade and when I lived there the afternoon siesta was sacred for our whole community

EVERYTHING shut down for a nap from about 2-5 p.m. When you go out to eat every night around 10 p.m and don't get home until midnight or 1, you've gotta find some way to get your beauty sleep!

The WHOLE COUNTRY took an afternoon nap every day! Think about how wonderful that is! Everyone loved it, everyone did it, it just made life more fun and enjoyable! Every time I think about it makes me want to go back—this is a fantastic, life-changing idea! Quality of life through the roof!

Built into the 10 Commandments, right up there with don't kill and don't lie and worship God only is the commandment that we take a day-long siesta!

The Spanish people take an afternoon siesta because it enables them to live the late-night partying lifestyle that the whole culture loves

God commands his people to take a day-long siesta every week because God has gone ahead of them to prepare good works in advance for us to do, some of which will echo into eternity!

We need to well-rested physically and spiritually so that we SEE the work, meet God in it, and have the spiritual and physical energy to step in and do it.

Because if we don't enter into God's rest spiritually and if we don't rest physically, we become a restless people—which is exactly who and what we are, isn't it?

We've got one more tour stop this morning where Moses will talk about this in a slightly different way, but let's go ahead and ask this question together:

Do you have a healthy rhythm of spiritual and physical rest built into your life that would enable you to experience God's rest?

Because restlessness is the inability to make peace with where we are and what we're doing because something doesn't feel quite RIGHT about what where we are and what we're doing and we feel a little stuck

But at the core of it, there's a spiritual issue that runs deeper than the situational issues we're facing

And the invitation from this Scripture is to build in healthy rhythms of spiritual and physical rest that we might quiet that restlessness NO MATTER THE CIRCUMSTANCES

There are centuries of Christians who have declared that they have a deep sense of peace even while in jail or dead-end jobs or miserable conditions, over-worked and under-worked, didn't matter

They had dealt with the spiritual core of their restlessness and that freed them FROM restlessness

and the vast majority have done this by building in some very intentional rhythms of spiritual and physical rest that enabled them to embrace and receive and root themselves in the eternal rest of God.

When we build in and front-load regular spiritual and physical siesta into our lives, we are positioning ourselves to be a less restless people

Do you have a healthy rhythm of spiritual and physical rest built into your life that would enable you to experience God's rest?

Now of course the problem with this weekly built-in rhythm of spiritual and physical rest is that some of you are sitting here adding up all the reasons why this isn't sustainable or possible

all the work that you wouldn't get done and all the stuff that would pile up if you committed to a weekly hard-stop

This was also a reality for the ancient Israelites as well, and in fact this might be what drives Moses to write something a little bit different a little later on

Several decades after the initial receiving of the 10 commandments in Exodus 20, Moses is re-capping the 10 commandments for a new generation of Israelites who were just kids or maybe not even born yet when they were delivered from Egypt and God gave them the 10 commandments initially

And perhaps in those several decades Joe and Josephine Israelite have felt the productivity crunch—there's always more work to do than time to do it, particularly true in an agricultural society as we'll talk about in a minute

So in Deuteronomy 5, several decades after he initially delivered the 10 commandments, Moses is re-capping the 10 commandments and he gives this slightly different rationale for taking the day off each week:

¹² “Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the Lord your God has commanded you. ¹³ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁴ 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 ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns, so that your male and female servants may rest, as you do.

Okay, so that's almost identical to last time, but next Moses varies away from the creation account reason for sabbath to a different line of reasoning:

¹⁵ Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.

Do you know what slavery reduces you to? A mere cog of production. A slave is only good for producing or doing something mostly that nobody else wants to do

Slavery takes the good gift of work, which we were made to do, and makes it the sole evaluator of your worth on this planet, uses you for that work without any respect for your personhood beyond your work. When you can't work any more, you're useless

And since a slave was only good for production, a slave never took a day off. There were no sabbath days of rest for slaves. There was only work or death. That's all there was, that's all you were worth

Work USED TO BE the only measure of your worth. BUT NOW, Moses says, the Lord God has put a value on you that is NOT PRIMARILY tied to your work

You are valuable merely because you are God's and God is yours. Your value comes not merely from producing but simply by virtue of being.

God has given you value, rescued you, drawn you up from a life where work was all that made you valuable into a completely new economy where your value is not dependent on your performance

On the surface, this commandment to sabbath rest was utterly foolish. In an agricultural society, you worked whenever the crops and the weather told you it was time to work. If it was planting time, you planted, didn't matter what day it was

If it was harvest time, you harvested, didn't matter what day it was. If the weather had been too miserable to do important work that week and it was finally a sunny day on the sabbath, what were you supposed to do?

To declare that you were going to rest NO MATTER WHAT the cost or the daylight or the status of the harvest was dumb

But by putting this in place, God was telling them not only are you valuable apart from work but ultimately you will be provided for because there is a God who is bigger than the weather or the crops who will take care of you

Sabbath rest wasn't laziness, it wasn't just for our comfort, it was a call to reckless, radical faith. It was a call to put into action the faith that they were saying that they all believed

But very often there's a significant gap for Christians between what we SAY we believe about God and HOW we actually live

Sabbath rest was an invitation to close that gap in a significant way

For everyone of us who is arguing inside your head that you don't have time to rest, that you can't rest, there are too many urgent and pressing things in your life
you are absolutely right. You can't. The math doesn't add up.

But neither could the Israelites, and God knew that. And he knew that if we got sucked into a life without any healthy rhythms of rest, that in the end restlessness would over-run all of us

So he invite the Israelites several thousand years ago and us today to put some healthy external structure around our working so that we might

I love to work and I have a job where I could easily work 7 days a week, 18 hours a day—and because what I do is God-stuff, I can even make it sound really, really spiritual and holy to over-work!

I say that God is bigger than me and that ultimately everything that I most long to see happen in our community is really in God's hands—I believe that!

But for a long time, there was this gap between what I said I believed about God being bigger than me and God being the one who's in charge of this whole operation and how I actually lived

And the place where that gap was most evident was in my inability to put down work and to embrace a healthy rhythm of rest.

So after many years of wrestling with this whole idea of healthy rhythms, here's what I've finally come to: wake-up through dinner time on Saturdays, I don't work

I don't check email, I don't answer my phone or texts. I hang out with the kids, read a good book, watch some sports on t.v, mow the lawn, take the dog on a long walk to the river, get together with friends

After dinner, I'll check email and do some work on the message for Sunday morning, but during the day I'm pretty much just not doing normal work stuff

try to make Saturday my day to unplug from the machine of work and to be present to the rest of my life.

I'd say that I'm probably batting around 80-85% success rate. Some Saturdays there's just work I have to do because just like many of you, my job doesn't fit neatly into a box

But putting that boundary in place as my default expectation has been super-helpful for me—that unless there's some sort of a crisis, I'm taking the daylight hours fully off, that shifts my mindset a bit

Because when it comes to healthy rhythms of rest, all of us are a bit like the tomato plant—if we don't have some healthy external structure around us, our restlessness will just sprawl all over the place

Restlessness is this inability to make peace with where you are or what you're doing because you have a sense that something's not quite RIGHT about where you are or what you're doing (and sometimes you feel a little stuck)

But at the core of it, it's a spiritual problem, not a situational problem

And if we don't deal with the spiritual root of the problem, we'll just change the stuff on the outside and bring our core restlessness WITH US into the next job or next hobby or next relationship

God knew all that, and so in this passage he's inviting us into a healthy rhythm of rest through a healthy external structure.

And so today's **Take-WITH** is a remix of the previous question:

What would built-in healthy rhythms of spiritual and physical rest look like that would enable you to experience God's rest?