

Deeper: Week 3
October 8: Get into God's Rhythm
"Rest in Peace"
Martha Stringer
Luke 6:1-16

Have you ever considered what your epitaph will say – what you might have written on your tombstone? You should think about it. After all it's your parting words to the world. Words you will be remembered by. Would you say something tongue in cheek? Like this guy: Here lies Johnny Yeast. Pardon me for not rising." Or maybe something poetic like this: "Here lies Clyde whose life was full. Until he tried to milk a bull." Maybe you'll share something profound about your religious beliefs like this epitaph: "Here lies an atheist. All dressed up and no place to go." And of course you know what it says on a hypochondriac's tombstone..."I told you I was sick!"

Whatever you choose it's very likely that it will be followed by "Rest in Peace" The phrase "Rest in Peace" has been a fixture on Christian gravestones since the 18th century. It means, essentially; let the soul of the person buried here find peace in death.

To which I pose the question: why do we have to die to find rest? Is it only when we succumb to the sickness of busyness that will be at peace?

Because busy-ness is a sickness:

Dr. Susan Koven practices internal medicine at Massachusetts General Hospital. In a [2013 Boston Globe column](#), she wrote:

"In the past few years, I've observed an epidemic of sorts: patient after patient suffering from the same condition. The symptoms of this condition include fatigue, irritability, insomnia, anxiety, headaches, heartburn, bowel disturbances, back pain, and weight gain. There are no blood tests or X-rays diagnostic of this condition, and yet it's easy to recognize. The condition is excessive busyness."

We've heard for years that excessive stress causes health problems. But notice that Dr. Koven didn't say stress. She said busyness.

I remember a day not so very long ago when I just parked myself on my sofa and decided to do nothing. In the middle of the day no less! The house was quiet, the couch was cozy. It could have been so relaxing except for the palpitations of guilt that had my heart bunny hopping around my rib cage. Maybe you can relate – I am a better human doing than being. Doing fills me with purpose. Being racks me with guilt.

Many of us share this perception that downtime is indulgent. Lives void of productivity lack meaning and busy-ness adds value. We measure our self-worth by what we've accomplished or amassed. When was the last time you asked someone "how are you?" and they responded with

“Oh, just rested, relaxed and peaceful, thank you very much.” Instead we answer with our litany of “to-dos.” Sometimes I’m worn out just hearing what you’ve done/are doing/plan to do in the near future. My answers wear me out too...although I usually can’t hear them above my bunny hopping heart as I mentally compare my to-do list to yours. Am I doing as much? As well? Am I being a good steward of my time”? And when my time “to-do” is up will God say, “Well done good and faithful servant. Now you can rest in peace.”

We are in week 3 of our Deeper series and we are talking about how to get into God’s rhythm. And God did have a specific plan about the rhythm of work and rest. He actually modeled it for us in the creation story in Genesis. After six busy days of creating we read: “By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.” 2:2-3

And Moses reiterates this in the 10 Commandments: “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work... 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 20:8-11

God took a rest – and he wants rest for us too. And we need it:

“True rest seems to be elusive for most Americans. Only one in seven adults (14 percent) set aside a day a week for rest. And on that one day a week, what do they do? Mostly, they work. Only one in five (19 percent) of this small group say they don't do any work at all. Even fewer Americans commit to daily time alone (16 percent) or with God (21 percent) or to activities that recharge them (12 percent). Only 12 percent of American adults say that they intentionally set aside a time of day when they don't use electronic devices.”

Andy Crouch, [The Tech-Wise Family](#) (Baker Books, 2017), page 104

<http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2017/july/8071717.html>

Let’s clarify here – I don’t want to be unfair. There is a most damaging kind of busy-ness - the kind over which we have no control, which primarily affects the less fortunate. Their economic reality simply does not allow for downtime. They have to work two to three jobs to keep the family afloat. The busyness we are talking about today is the busyness we control.

The word Sabbath originally meant to be separate, to step away from work and the world for a bit. It is not just a nap, vacation, retirement or down time in front of the tube. The book of Hebrews reminds us, “There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make

every effort to enter that rest..." (Hebrews 4:9-11). Notice the author of Hebrews says "make every effort." So ironically even taking a Sabbath is going to take a little work.

For some of us, taking a rest will be harder, at first, than work. Because it often is good stuff we're doing. Striving for the best for our jobs, family and friends. The trouble is as long as we are working hard, using our gifts to serve others, experiencing joy in our work, we are in danger of believing our actions trigger God's love for us. Only in stopping, really stopping, do we teach our hearts and souls that we are loved apart from what we do.

Jesus and his disciples observed the Sabbath. We talked earlier in the series about Jesus reading from the scroll of Isaiah in the synagogue on the Sabbath as was "his custom." Yet Jesus ends up clashing with the Jewish religious leaders over the significance of what it meant to observe the Sabbath.

In Luke Chapter 6 we read:

"One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and his disciples began to pick some heads of grain, rub them in their hands and eat the kernels. Some of the Pharisees asked, "Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?"

Jesus answered them, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and taking the consecrated bread, he ate what is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions." Then Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

Luke 6:1-5

This account of Jesus riling up the Pharisees on the Sabbath is in the 3 Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, and all essentially recorded the same way. Jesus replies to the Pharisees accusations about violating the Sabbath by reminding them what the true intent of that rule was. King David ate the consecrated bread on the Sabbath to satisfy hunger and to fortify his men not to over indulge with a feast. Jesus' point is that he and his men are in the same position as David and his men had been. They were an exception to the normal rule. Normally only the priests in the sanctuary ate the consecrated but David claimed the right to do so because he was the chosen king of Israel when he was a boy. At the time of the story David is on the run keeping away from Saul waiting for the time when his kingship would come true.

The same is true of Jesus. He, too, has been anointed as Israel's king and is waiting for the right time. He too is on the move with his men.

These Gospel accounts also include these words Jesus spoke that were guaranteed to make the Jewish leaders angry: "The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath." Jesus is establishing himself as the one who gave the gift of the Sabbath. He also says the Sabbath was made for man not man

for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27) so not only did he give the Sabbath to man he can establish what is appropriate or inappropriate behavior.

In short Jesus is rejecting the way the Pharisees' have taken the interpretation of Sabbath rest to the extreme. He wants to show that God's new world and therefore a new interpretation of the old covenant is coming. Jesus cuts through the traditions that have accumulated over thousands of years and emphasizes the God-given purpose of the Sabbath. A day, a gift, for our spiritual, mental and physical restoration. So what does a Sabbath look like for us? Does it have to be all day? Does it have to be a particular day?

Your Sabbath is going to be unique you to you. The key to it will be to identify what you need to cease from doing in order to focus on God honor this gift God gives you. Be purposeful about it.

First and foremost the Sabbath reminds us to cease from work. Remember the reason given in the old testament of keeping the Sabbath is that the Israelites were slaves in Egypt and went four hundred years without a vacation. We are invited on the Sabbath to remember we have been freed from slavery by the death and resurrection of Jesus.

If you work for pay then stopping those activities outside of paid time is a great place to start. If you work from home or your primary responsibility is to care for those in your home then consider stopping anything that could appear on your daily to-do list. Essentially rest on the Sabbath as if all your work were done...rest even from the thought of labor.

Leonardo Da Vinci, was a pretty busy guy: a sculptor, painter, poet, architect, engineer, city planner, scientist, inventor, anatomist, military genius and philosopher. He offered the following advice. "Every now and then go away, have a little relaxation, for when you come back to your work your judgment will be surer, since to remain constantly at work will cause you to lose power of judgment. Go some distance away because then the work appears smaller, and more of it can be taken in at a glance, and lack of harmony or proportion is more readily seen."

Here's God's formula for staying calm in a dot com world.

First, let Him **Refresh** you. In Exodus we read: "Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest, and so that the slave born in your household and the foreigner living among you may be refreshed." Exodus 23:12

After creating the world, God looked around and saw that "it was very good" (Genesis 1:31). God did not just cease from his labor; he stopped and enjoyed what he had made. What does this mean for us? We need to stop to enjoy God, to enjoy his creation, to enjoy the fruits of our labor. A key point of Sabbath is joy in what God has done.

When we are under the stress of busy-ness our heart rates elevate our breath quickens our thoughts race. I believe God truly wants us to physiologically slow down – meaning take deep, lung filling breaths. At creation God breathed life into humans. Every breath we take comes from

God. Right before his death, Jesus breathed on his disciples and said “Receive the Holy Spirit. (John 20:22). The Sabbath is an opportunity to breathe deeply, focus on God and pay attention to the beauty around you. Deep slow breathing also makes you more available to listen to God.

And listening to God is our way to **Re-connect**. God knows everything about us. But he longs for us to be in a continual relationship with him. A relationship is defined as the way in which two or more concepts, objects, or people are connected, or the state of being connected. In order to connect with God we need to nurture our relationship with him. The two best ways I know to do that is through reading his word and worship. As we go through this Deeper series we are challenged to really dig into God’s word. Are you connecting with His word? The Scriptures are not a dead document, but are living, powerful, and God-breathed words of truth. I am always amazed at what I hear God saying to me through Scripture when I really spend time to breathe it in.

What is your attitude about worship – do you have to be here? Or you *get* to be here? Worship is a demonstration of your love for God and a powerful way to connect with him. There is a worship song I love which has this line...”so I fall on my knees, to get back on my feet again and I cry out to you to please speak to me.” It’s pretty hard to run on your knees. Use worship as a time to stop and reconnect.

Finally, when we rest in God’s presence He **Refuels** us. Cars without gas don’t go. When our tanks are dry we can’t do much for ourselves or others. In his book Sensing Jesus, Zack Eswine shares about a time of intense busyness and over-commitment. His colleagues were worried about him. Many people tried to get his attention, but he refused to listen until he received a very special letter that finally changed his life. Zack writes: “I received a letter. It was the old-fashioned kind of letter with a stamp on the envelope. The words were written by hand with a pen. I opened it and heard my mom's voice as I read. She too must have heard the alarm. "Son," she wrote, "a tree has to have roots to provide shade.” Eswine says he learned the following lesson: "Shade is hard to give when roots remain shallow." In other words, when we don't have deep roots in God's love, when we don't abide in Christ, we won't be able to provide the kind of compassion and care that truly ministers to others.”

<http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2013/january/6010713.html>

That is what we get when we observe a time of Sabbath. A chance to Refresh, Re-connect with God and let him Refuel us. Use purposeful opportunities to put your busy-ness to death so you can rest in peace in life.