**Series Road Map**

**Sabbath**

**Series Overview:** All of us have a theology. As the Christian Church, we proclaim Jesus as Lord and strive to live a life modeled after him and surrendered to him. But how do we do that? How do we model the practices of Jesus in 20223 and beyond? This series of one-off messages, “Practices of Jesus”, will take us through how Jesus lived his life on earth and focus specifically on a variety of practices of Jesus.

**Week Overview:** This message unpacks the practice of Sabbath. The focus of the message is on the temporary rewards that the world offers compared to the eternal rewards of God. By walking through Matthew 4, we will unpack what Sabbath is, why it’s important, and what we gain when we routinely step into the grace that it offers.

***Outline:***

**Grab the Room (intro): Cultural Context**

**Tension (what’s the struggle):** Is there a practice that can provide rest for our souls? Is there a way out of the “hurry sickness” consuming our digital age?

**Text:** Mark 1:35, Matthew 14:23, Luke 5:15-16, Genesis 2:1-3, Exodus 20:8-11, Deuteronomy 5:12-15, Mark 2:27

**Truth:** Combatting the 3 core temptations of the soul: To be important, to be useful, and to be powerful.

**THP**: **The Sabbath is a gift to enjoy!**

**Supporting Points:**

**Application (call to action)**:

*Red – Scripture*

*Blue – Personal Story*

*Green – Prop*

***THP/Main Points – Bold***

**INTRO:**

We’ve all been there. Let’s not pretend like we haven’t. It is 2023 after all.

You know, the point where utter exhaustion has overtaken you? The moment where you begin to question everything. The instant that dreaded question arises, “what on earth am I doing here?”

In no way is this an attempt to hyperbolize life’s hardships or evoke feelings of self-pity. Such instances are simply a reality in our over-worked, hyper-busy, outrageously-efficient, manic-paced lives.

Because if you didn’t know, we are overworked. We are hyper-busy, outrageously efficient and we do live at a manic pace.

Perhaps if we slowed down enough to think about it, that fact would become clear.

Consider this: 100 years ago, the top-selling vehicle was Henry Ford’s Model T car that had a top speed of 45 mph[[1]](#footnote-1). In 1921, cell phones did not exist, neither did in-home televisions. Obviously social media wasn’t in the picture nor were smartphones, apps or the internet. Simply put, the world lived at a much slower pace.

There was no other option.

Why does that matter? Studies show that Americans were actually the happiest they had ever been in the early 1920’s[[2]](#footnote-2). It seems a balance of technological efficiency and personal awareness had reached its peak.

So, what does that mean for our society today? Consider the facts that suicide rates, depression and anxiety are higher than they were 10 years ago and climbing[[3]](#footnote-3) and you start to wonder if perhaps the pace of life is pushing us beyond our limits.

I’m sure a lot of this, you’ve already heard. Every time a public figure takes their life or attempts to, it’s brought up. Any instance of extreme cyber-bullying or mass shootings bring these conversations to the forefront. We’re aware of the dangers our pace of life presents and yet, so few of us are willing to do anything about it.

**TENSION:**

The pace of life, the constant noise, demands, technology and speed of our modern-day society have all taken higher precedent and priority than our devotion to Jesus.

In 2023, hurry is almost a prerequisite of living in our Western society. If you’re not hustling, if you’re not grinding, if you’re not busy, then are you really doing anything?

But could there be a better way? A way that allows us to experience life as it should be—life to the full? A life of work and rest, meaning and monotony, impact and reprieve? A practice that would allow us to, as the Philosopher Dallas Willard once said, to “ruthlessly eliminate hurry[[4]](#footnote-4)?”

**TRUTH:**

In Matthew chapter 4, Jesus is baptized, and the Holy Spirit descends upon him, “like a dove” so the Scriptures say. And in the NEXT moment, that same Spirit drives Jesus out to the desert to be tempted by the Devil.

For the next 40 days, Jesus and Satan go head-to-head in a battle for the soul. Throughout those 40 days, the 3—what Henri Nouwen calls the “core” or strongest—temptations of the soul are exposed. They are:

**To be useful.**

**To be important.**

**And to be powerful.**

For all time, those 3 temptations have been stirring inside us—calling us to forget the Way of Jesus for the way of—what many New Testament authors call—the world.

I don’t know about you, but if I’m not careful, those temptations can grow unhealthy to the point where my priorities begin to be misplaced.

I begin to say yes to things that are not important and no to things or to people who are important.

Can you relate?

Last year, my desire to help people had become consumed by the temptation to be seen as useful and important. I thought that if I wasn’t around, the world could not go on without me.

Saying it out loud sounds crazy, but how many of us believe that?

This life that we’ve been entrusted with is sacred and essential, but we are not as important as we like to think we are.

The reality is much of the world will forget about us quickly after we are dead and gone. I don’t say that to sound morbid, but to speak to the reality of life. But who you are becoming—as a follower of Jesus—is what’s *most* important. This is the piece of our lives that continues with us into eternity.

So, it is at this point, my friends, that we must choose.

Will we obey the way of the world or the way of Jesus?

Will we give into the three core temptations of the soul and allow those to drive a crazy pace of life? Or, will we choose to go another way?

What if we brought back the ancient practice of Sabbath?

**THP: The Sabbath is a gift to enjoy!**

**Text:**

I want to look at 3 separate texts from the Gospels, but if you have a Bible, you can turn to Luke chapter 5, verse 15 as that’s where we’ll finish.

We’ll begin however in Mark 1, verse 35. Notice the language that’s used in these texts:

*Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.*

Matthew 14, verse 23:

*After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray.*

And finally, Luke chapter 5, verses 15 and 16:

*Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses.****16****But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.*

I don’t know about you, but I see the 3 temptations of the soul tempting Jesus in this moment.

The news about him spread all the more, crowds of people are coming to hear him—sounds like someone who’s important, yeah?

They came to be healed of their sickness. Healing the sick? You must be pretty powerful to heal the sick.

Healing the sick? Oh, what a USEFUL gift to help and serve others.

You may be too prideful to say it, but I’ll go ahead and just admit: if crowds of people were coming to me, if I was healing the sick, it’d be hard for me to not feel useful, to feel important, to feel powerful.

Yet, Jesus never gave into these temptations…he never used his position, his influence, or his power to exploit or take advantage of the people he was serving and the people closest to him.

How? *But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.*

But.

This word, “but” is used in contrast. Jesus did ALLLL of these amazing things.

People were seeking him out, he was important, he was useful, he was powerful according to the world around him.

But.

But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

Jesus had a full understanding of the rhythms of rest—of Sabbath. A routine reminder that, as Pastor and Author John Ortberg writes, “there is a God and it is not me.”

If Jesus, the Savior of the World—who IS God in flesh—observed that rhythm, how much more important is it for us to do the same?

In Hebrew Sabbath is the word, Shabbat. Can you say it with me? “Shabbat.” Well done.

It means, “to stop.”

Jesus was the master of engaging and withdrawing. Of starting and stopping. Of echoing and mirroring the rhythms of rest that God has hardwired us with.

**THP: The Sabbath is a gift to enjoy!**

**TEXT:**

There’s a lot of scriptural evidence that Jesus was a regular practitioner of Sabbath. We don’t have time to get into all of it, but Luke 4, Matthew 12, Luke 13, they all speak to Jesus observing the Sabbath.

At this point, two questions are probably floating to the top of your mind:

**First, what is Sabbath?**

In the beginning, God makes the Heavens and the Earth. For 6 days, God creates the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the trees, and the stars. He also creates human beings. But on the 7th day, he rests.

Genesis 2:1-3 says,

*Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.*

God takes a step back from his work and ENJOYS it.

On the 7th day, God leaves space and room to REST. A 24-hour period of unhurried delight with no have-tos or ought-tos, resulting in deep rest and renewal.

**THP: The Sabbath is a gift to enjoy!**

Tracing the practice of Sabbath throughout the Scriptures is fascinating. The book of Exodus gives us the clearest picture.

In fact, the practice of Sabbath was actually commanded to us BY God Himself. Seriously, right up there with the command to not murder, steal, or cheat on your spouse is a command to REST.

And not only that, it’s actually the LONGEST commandment given. The Sabbath command takes up approximately 34% of the 10 commandments. This is an important practice, given to us by God.

But did you know that the command actually shows up TWICE in the book of Exodus? The first time is in Exodus 20, verse 8, which says:

***“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 20:8-11)*

So, the first instruction given to us is to REMEMBER the Sabbath. Keep that in mind, because a few books and a few decades later, God gives the SAME command to the Israelite’s children and grandchildren. Well…almost. Check it out, Deuteronomy 5, beginning in verse 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.****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. (Deuteronomy 5:12-15)*

So the first command is to REMEMBER. And the second time it’s to OBSERVE.

Why the difference?

Well, in the arc of the biblical narrative, the Exodus takes place thousands of years after the genesis of creation. And, as we’ve already seen, God institutes Sabbath at the beginning of creation. So, for the Israelite people, this was a command to REMEMBER the Sabbath. To REMEMBER rest. That they were no longer bound by slavery to the Egyptians. Rather, they were FREE to enjoy and integrate into the original rhythm of creation that God had instituted. In the same way that we are to REMEMBER Christ’s body and blood through the bread and the cup of communion, so too do we REMEMBER that there is a God, and it is not us. Every 7 days, we submit to the rhythm of rest and trust God to be God.

But then comes the command AGAIN in Deuteronomy. This time, it’s to OBSERVE. Why sub out REMEMBER with OBSERVE?

Well, just as it is today, the Israelites had a myriad of things vying for their time, their attention, and their effort. So, the invitation in Deuteronomy is no longer to remember, but to observe. Translation: PRACTICE THIS.

God commands his people to observe the Sabbath. To not give into consumerism, conquest, or creation. But to—instead—*rest.* To stop. To enjoy. To soak in the gift that the Sabbath day offers.

Sabbath is a gift from God that we are to receive. In Mark 2:27, Jesus says, *"The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.”*

**THP: The Sabbath is a gift to enjoy!**

**Application:**

But the second question that most likely comes to mind is how do I practice Sabbath? **How do I do it?**

1. **My first suggestion—and forgive me for the stating the obvious—is to look to Jesus.**

Look at the rhythms in which he lived his life.

Jesus did not wait until everyone had been properly cared for.

He didn’t wait until all who sought him were healed.

He did not ask permission to go, nor did he leave anyone behind, ‘on call,’ or even let his disciples know where he was going.

Jesus obeyed a deeper rhythm.

When the moment for rest had come, the time for healing was over. He would simply stop, retire to a quiet place, and pray.

Look at the life of Jesus and how he obeyed the deeper rhythm of our souls. How he surrendered and submitted his life to God on a routine basis.

1. **Start Small.**

The traditional period of Sabbath rest is a full 24 hours. Yep, 24 hours of genuine REST.

Now, if a 24-hour period seems like a daunting task right now, that’s okay!

Begin with an hour, a morning, or an afternoon of intentional *rest.*

Listen to your body and your soul and obey that deeper rhythm.

When you feel it is time to rest, retreat and rest with the intention of coming back and ENGAGING your congregation, your spouse, and your children as a person of grace, peace, and love.

1. **Develop consistency.**

Because we are rhythmic creatures, we respond well to consistency.

Even if it’s an hour every Friday, protect that hour.

Make that a sacred hour to retreat and rest and pray!

Know that there’s no RIGHT way to practice Sabbath. What’s restful for me may certainly not be restful for you and that’s OKAY!

However here are 4 core movements in a Biblical Sabbath that could be useful in helping us put together what our time of rest will look like. They are:

***To stop.***

***To rest.***

***To find joy or happiness.***

***To think.***

A quick explanation of each:

**To stop** means to stop your paid AND unpaid work. Take an hour, a morning, or if you can, a day to cease all work, productivity, and accomplishment. Surrender your need to produce to God who provides in abundance.

**To REST** means to take a nap, to sit or lie down in a comfortable position, or to practice an activity that gives you life. What would you do if you had no have-tos or ought-tos? That’s the rest your soul is seeking.

**To find joy or happiness** means to enjoy who God is.

Take in the world around you.

Look for the beauty and wonder of God’s creation in the smallest things—the wrinkles on your hand, the fine detail of the insects in the air, the veins on the leaves of the trees.

Slow down and find joy in God’s creation.

And finally**, THINK.** We stop working but we don’t stop creating.

Create space to invite God in to take a look at your soul.

What’s keeping you from taking a REAL rest?

From stopping work?

Give God the space to bring to light the motivations and drivers for forsaking his rhythms of rest. For not being a person of love, grace, and peace. Give him space to work in you and through.

Leave room to THINK.

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**INSPIRATION:**

Students, we are witnessing in real time, the destructive effects of a society that refuses to rest. That refuses to engrain into the natural rhythm of creation—work 6 days, rest 1.

And we’re paying the price.

Crippling anxiety, debilitating depression, and constant stress are just a few of the number of poor side effects to a life that is constantly “on” and “going.”

But what if we changed that?

What if we leaned into Sabbath as *resistance*?

What if we chose to abide in the Vine that is Jesus? What if we believed him when he said not to worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow has enough trouble of it’s own? What if we trusted that, just as he feeds the birds of the sky and the clothes lilies of the field, so too will he provide for us, even when we deliberately choose to refrain and retreat for a 24-hour period each week?

Friends, I believe the answer to our anxiety, to our stress, to the constant tug and pull on our souls—it’s already been given to us.

It’s been given in the form of a weekly rhythm. A gift.

The Shabbat.

And the invitation is to stop, to rest, to find joy, and to think.

Will you choose to reorient your life around the rhythm that Jesus offers? **THP: The Sabbath is a gift to enjoy!** It may just change your life.

*Let’s pray.*

*Prayer.*

*Amen.*

1. http://www.mtfca.com/coils/Coils.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41562-019-0750-z> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/mental-health-and-mental-disorders/national-snapshot [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Comer, John Mark, The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry [↑](#footnote-ref-4)