



Slower Living

Week 1: Rest

Heather Blair - 06/07/2026

Good morning.

How are you today?

Me? I've been having one of those stretches that make you go, "Really, universe? This too?" Nothing truly terrible, just a series of things that adds up to too much. The week before last I had a colonoscopy. I promise not to go into great detail here... but you know. Not the most pleasant couple of days. On the day of my clear liquid prep, my air conditioning went out. And not "out" in a cute way. Like dead, dead. Fortunately, that week wasn't crazy hot, but it was HU-mid. Like, "Why is my toothbrush sweating?" humid. And then last weekend it got HOT too. Here's something super fun about me, apparently I can turn something not working into a whole lot of work. Open all the windows at this time, put this fan here and that fan there and one for the dog. Then two hours later, close all the windows and blinds and redistribute the fans and put ice in the dog's dish. And take another shower and google "Can carpets be squeegeed?" Whew. I am a lot sometimes. Over not very much. I mean, it's not even the sort of thing you can call in to work for. "I'm sorry, I can't make it today because I have been hot for 53 hours straight and I'm tired from moving fans."

You just have to keep going. Life is so life-y sometimes— isn't it? For almost all of us. Thing after thing, but we just keep swimming. Gotta get here, gotta get there, gotta get to this to-do list, gotta make a new to-do list. The cycle seems to just feed itself. We tell ourselves, "It'll slow down as soon as..." "Life will get back to normal once..." [this] is over. But there's always a new *this* to contend with. Hectic seems to breed hectic. And we can be our own worst enemies in the midst of it. Always racing to be doing "enough" about life being life-y.

So, in this month's sermon series we're going to be reminding ourselves that slowing down is an option. Maybe not an easy option. A slower life may require sacrifice and discipline just like a hyper-busy one does. But I think it's good to remind ourselves that it *is* an option. In the midst of chaos there are some things we can do to make room for serenity, for breathing. This isn't a "you-must" series—we don't really do those around here, but I want to be extra clear that *this* isn't one. This is a series of invitations, not commands. Life is going to be life-y. We certainly don't want to heap the shame of a bunch of *shoulds* on top of that. Instead we want to take the chance to help ourselves ask questions like: *can* I slow down and still feel like someone who's enough? What things might it be okay for me to let go of so that I have more room to take hold of things like peace, and health, and joy?

Invitations to a slower life. Let's see about one.

Today's invitation is: Rest. Rest. Like for real. Not super spiritualized. Like, just, doing nothing. Or, at least doing something rejuvenating instead of exhausting. The idea of rest is baked in to the stories in the Bible from the very beginning. This is Genesis 2—from the first creation account:

**Heaven and Earth were finished,
down to the last detail.**

**By the seventh day
God had finished his work.**

On the seventh day

**he rested from all his work.
God blessed the seventh day.
He made it a Holy Day
Because on that day he rested from his work,
all the creating God had done.**

From the beginning, rest was something God valued—even for God’s self. Do we think God was tired? Was God like, “Ugh. I got such a crick in my neck making all those ants! I had to pull an all-nighter making the night. And don’t even get me started on what it takes out of you to make a human, am I right ladies? I need a nap!” We don’t know, but that doesn’t seem likely. Genesis doesn’t give us a whole lot of details, it just says, God rested. And that was important enough to include as a part of the creation story.

The next place that the idea of a day of rest shows up is in Exodus 16. Moses has guided the Jewish people out of slavery in Egypt, but now they are adrift in the desert—with no place of their own, and in stark conditions. It may be no surprise that a few of them started grumbling saying things like this in Exodus 16:3:

“Why didn’t God let us die in comfort in Egypt where we had lamb stew and all the bread we could eat? You’ve brought us out into this wilderness to starve us to death, the whole company of Israel!”

Their lives had been everything but comfortable in Egypt, but hindsight can come with rose-colored glasses. What happens next is another of those pretty crazy stories like we’ve just spent time with in Genesis. In response to the people’s complaints, God tells Moses and Aaron that each morning bread will fall from the sky—just enough for that day. And every evening quail will come out, just enough for that evening. God asks Moses to tell the people to collect just what they need for each day—except for on the sixth day they should collect enough for two days. On the seventh day, God invites the

people to rest from their hunting and gathering. He invites them to have a holy day...a holiday. A holiday from being miraculously fed from the sky. Once a week. I mean, COME ON. That's pretty great, isn't it?

How do you think the people respond? Of course, they're a mess. A bunch of them don't think God is serious about the rest day. They're sure they better take care of things on their own and go out searching on the seventh day. Again and again—until God finally gets a little feisty with them through Moses and says: "I HAVE GIVEN YOU A DAY OFF AND I MEAN IT. JUST STAY HOME."

God is so serious about a day of rest, that a little later in Exodus it shows up in the 10 Commandments. It's hard not to hear a little of God's experience with the manna, because this is the fourth commandment:

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Work six days and do everything you need to do. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to God, your God. Don't do any work—not you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your servant, nor your maid, nor your animals, not even the foreign guest visiting in your town. For in six days God made Heaven, Earth, and sea, and everything in them; he rested on the seventh day. Therefore God blessed the Sabbath day; he set it apart as a holy day.

Finally the Israelites believe God is serious about a day of rest. A day meant as a gift. As a celebration. As a holiday. But, humans gonna human. So, as time goes on, the people pendulum swings from not taking the rest day seriously at all to taking it seriously to the millionth power. They make all kinds of extra rules about what, exactly, work is. Over time they develop a list of 39 categories of work—each with sub-categories. They parse out exactly how much weight someone can carry, and exactly how many steps can be taken. In a nutshell, they turn not working into the hardest work you can imagine.

That's the state of things when Jesus shows up. The Sabbath isn't a lovely, gentle day of spending time with God. It's a rigid, intense showing of religiosity. The religious leaders of Jesus' time use it as a trap. Accusing Jesus of breaking the day of rest with horrible things like healing people, or pulling a few heads of grain out of a field for a meager snack. Their critiques prompt Jesus to say in Mark 2:27:

The Sabbath was made to serve us; we weren't made to serve the Sabbath.

The Sabbath—this day of rest, was a gift offered—not a demand made. It was a provision to take care of us, not a demand to take something from us. But we humans often seem to think that's too good to be true. God can't really be okay with us resting—there is so much to do! But Jesus rested. He did not heal and preach and pray every single second of every single day. He poked at the religious leaders' idea of "rest," but not at God's.

One more place that the idea of rest shows up after Jesus is in the book of Hebrews. That writer argues that the rest we're invited to in the Sabbath is meant to be a taste of our ultimate rest in God—heaven. Resting requires trust in God, a belief in that invitation to rest. And working to believe in that invitation is practice for growing our faith overall. Believing we can afford to rest here and now will help us to believe there will be a time of fully resting in God. Experiencing something now, on earth, as it is in heaven.

So, we've found that writers, from cover to cover in the Bible, find the idea of rest important to the experience of being human. Why? What's the big deal about rest? It shows up at the beginning, in the commandments, with Jesus, at the end. It's not just a throw-away blip of a concept. How can it be so important? How can it serve us like Jesus says it does?

A critical word in the big idea of Sabbath is "remember." It's the action word in the commandment to rest—"remember the Sabbath." And, when God does any kind of explaining about why, there is always a pointing back to

remember something. The seventh day of creation, the rescue from Egypt, the keeping of God's part of the covenant. Rest involves remembering, what does it invite us to remember?

Like any good preacher, I have three things:

One. Resting invites us to remember that our value is knit into our being; it has absolutely nothing to do with our doing. God established a day of rest when humans were newly minted and hadn't done a lick of work. It was a gift. It *is* a gift. As is our life altogether. We don't *do* our way into being enough, we are *created* as enough—and anything that comes after that is the fruit of gratitude. We don't have to earn God's love. We cannot. We are enough because God gifted us into being as enough. And, he gave us the gift of rest to remind us of that. Rest is inextricably intertwined with creation. So that we can never convince ourselves that we become great through work. We start great, and whatever work we do is an expression of gratitude. A way of giving back—not of earning. One of my spiritual mentors says it this way:

Rest is not a reward for faithfulness. Rest is a prerequisite for fruitfulness.

- Alicia Chole

We are covered by grace from start to finish. You can't add to grace, nothing sticks to it. That voice that haunts you and keeps you hustling to do more more more so that you can be loveable? That's not God's voice. Be a hustler, there's nothing wrong with that—but be a hustler in response to who you are, not in order to be someone more worthy. And, realize that activity has a limit to the good it can do. It can become the grind that crushes your spirit, that steals the joy from life. It often traps us into seeing scarcity where there is actually plenty. So, rest. Interrupt that voice of not enough, with the reminder that *you* are the value to God, to us—not what you do.

Two. Resting reminds us to check in on what we're carrying on a daily basis. If we take a day every week or so to set everything down, then we have a

chance to sort out what we've got in our hands. Some things we will have to pick up again, even if they're heavy. Working, house-cleaning, caring for the folks in our circles. But some things deserve a good hard look. They might not be ours to carry. The expectations of others. The hauntings of failures past. The anxieties of things to come. These things all together can become literally unbearable. So, let's stop bearing them. A God-gifted day of rest comes with an invitation to leave some of those things behind. In my job I meet with so many people - who find themselves in all different kinds of troubling circumstances. I find myself thinking all the time - *oh, dearest, you are carrying too much*. Yes, there are things we have to do. Terribly hard things. So, let some of the other things go. What if you don't have the most perfect yard on the block? What if you can find dust on your shelves for an extra week? What if you lean in to loving your kid and believe that is AMAZING, gut-wrenching work? What if you don't have to carry the constant worry that you are screwing them up? What if you let yourself enjoy who you are instead of killing your spirit through comparison and accommodation? The gift of rest makes some space for us to choose how we will spend our energy.

Three. And finally, resting reminds us that we are not alone. Having a day to slow down gives us space to remember. To remember the places where God has shown up, where God has helped. To remember the people who have shown up, the people who have helped. To remember the people around us now who we could show up for. We are all carrying loads. Too much probably. I don't know how this math works, but I promise I've seen it to be true: if I let you carry a bit of my stuff, and in return carry a bit of yours - the net is lighter loads for us both. You know how I really survived colonoscopy prep and no AC? It wasn't my dedicated fan-moving frenzy - it was all the help I got from my village. I asked God for help several times - and God's people showed up. Lori took me to and from my colonoscopy. When we were on our way into the hospital we ran into the Smith family in the parking lot. Elias and Lucita were so happy to see us that it was an immediate relief from my fears.

Julie was ready to take care of Zeke if I needed it. So many folks invited me and Zeke to come stay with them for the hottest days. Help was so abundant. I didn't need all of it - but knowing it was there allowed me to lessen the load of worry I was carrying. I am not alone. You are not alone. We have each other. We have God. But it's hard to remember that if we keep ourselves in a frenzy of work.

So, friends. I'm reminding you: God is not a fearsome taskmaster constantly finding you lacking. God is someone who loves you. God sees your worth before you've done a thing. So, God invites you to rest. I hope your people do the same. That's what we can all do for each other. So that we can remember: we are not what we do, we don't have to carry everything, we are not alone.