**Make Room – Week 4 – Sabbath**

**Message Big Idea:** Sabbath is not a legalistic rule but an invitation to human flourishing.

**Scripture:** Matthew 11:28-30, Genesis 2:2-3, Exodus 20:8-11

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**Intro: Breaths per Minute**

*(Series Graphic)* How often do you think about your breathing? If you’re like me, that answer is pretty much…never. Unless, I quickly climb a flight of stairs. Then I’m very aware of my breathing and just how out of shape I am.

Well, this week I discovered that breathing actually has a lot to do with how stressed we are. Did you know that the rhythms of *how* we breathe differ greatly from country to country?

*(Global)* For example, the *global* average breaths per minute is *(Add)* **6.**

*(Add U.S. under Global)* Now, do you know what the average is here in the United States? *(Add)* **20**! How crazy is that? To illustrate how foreign the global average is for most of us, I thought we should all experience six breaths per minute together. This is what we are going to do: on the screen, we are going to have a timer and we are going to take a breath in and out every ten seconds for three minutes and see what happens. Are you ready?

*(Timer on screen leading inhaling/exhaling)*

*(Only do this for 3 cycles…30 seconds)* Alright, enough of that! Did that feel strange to anyone else? We’re not used to taking it slow! We are so accustomed to always being in the fast lane that it takes lots of intentionally when we’re asked to slow down. So let me ask you this morning:

* Does anyone feel rushed?
* Does anyone feel overworked?
* Does anyone feel overscheduled?

My guess is that a lot of us fit into one of those categories today, and I want to suggest that all of our chaotic movement comes down to one word: **DESIRE**.

**Our Reality**

Desire can be a good thing. Desire is the great motivator. It gets us out of bed in the morning and gets us going. But the problem comes in when desire is no longer under control. If desire is driving our lives, we are in trouble because desire is never satisfied.

We all have this inner nagging for more. Desire is infinite, but we are finite. This means that our desire can lead us into a chronic, insatiable state of restlessness. And our culture only worsens this sense of restlessness with its endless bombardment of messages about the latest trends or products, which can cause us to desire more and more.

Thomas Aquinas, a philosopher and a priest, was once asked, **“What would it take to satisfy human desire?”** His answer: *(add)* **“Everything.”**

Understand, this restlessness isn’t anything new. Thousands of years ago the writer of Ecclesiastes wrote:

**“All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing.” –Ecclesiastes 1:8**

Or as one modern prophet said: *(Picture of Mick Jagger)* **“I can’t get no satisfaction…”**

We are seldom satisfied. In fact, the United States is the only advanced country in the world with no national vacation policy. Many American workers leave vacation days unused.

We strive for more. We want more. And so we invest our time, energy, and effort on the things that we think will gain us more. The result? So many of us are plagued by busyness, greed, anxiety, discontentment, envy, and exhaustion. Many of us now suffer from something scientists have called “hurry sickness.” Psychology Today defines hurry sickness this way:

**Hurry Sickness: A behavior pattern characterized by continual rushing and anxiousness; an overwhelming and continual sense of urgency.**

Now, can I be vulnerable for a moment? I’ve been there. Many of us are feeling that way right now. But there is good news. Jesus came to offer us a different way of life.

**Series Recap**

*(Series Graphic)* We’re in the final week of our series **Make Room**. So many of us are longing for God to break through in our lives, and during this series we’ve learned about making room for him to do just that. Jesus taught his apprentices to engage in practices that help us make room. Practices such as repentance, fasting, prayer, and the practice we’re going to talk about today…**Sabbath**.

**Word: Sabbath**

Now for a lot of us, we might not have any idea what Sabbath is or, at best, might feel like it’s an outdated, irrelevant concept. But it’s actually something that God embedded into the fabric of the universe from the very beginning. Here’s what I mean. If we go to the very first book of the Bible, we see that Sabbath rest has always been a part of the rhythm of the world. Listen to how Genesis 2 puts it:

**“On the seventh day—with the canvas of the cosmos completed—God paused from His labor and rested. Thus God blessed day seven and made it special—an open time for pause and restoration, a sacred zone of Sabbath-keeping, because God rested from all the work He had done in creation that day. – Genesis 2:2-3 The Voice**

On the 7th day, God stops. Why? To rest. Central to God’s character is creating and producing…but also resting. And he made us in his image, so central to what it means to be human is to live into a rhythm of both work and rest. This rhythm of work and rest is essential for human flourishing. And God called this rest “Sabbath.” *(Sabbath = “To stop”)* Sabbath simply means “to stop.”

Now, keep in mind. The seventh day was also the first full day that Adam and Eve were alive! Think about that… their very first day, before they did or accomplished anything, was a day of stopping, a day of Sabbath. God cares deeply about what we do but he also cares about what we *don’t* do.

And this theme of stopping continues throughout the pages of scripture. In fact, pretty famously, in the 10 commandments God gives instruction to the Israelites about how they are to live. He says:

**“You and your family are to remember the Sabbath Day; set it apart, and keep it holy. You have six days to do all your work, but the seventh day is to be different; it is the Sabbath of your God. Keep it holy by not doing any work—not you, your sons, your daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock,** (Listen to that! God even wanted the livestock to rest! Your dog needs a Sabbath!) **or any outsiders living among you. For God made the heavens above, the earth below, the seas, and all the creatures in them in six days. Then, on the seventh day, He rested. That is why He blessed the Sabbath Day and made it sacred. – Exodus 20:8-11 The Voice**

Does any of that sound familiar? God is reminding them of the creation account back in Genesis, where God himself models this Sabbath rhythm! If the world didn’t fall apart when God took a break, is it possible the same might be true for us? God cares deeply about the pace and rhythms of our life.

Now, during the Babylonian Exile a saying emerged that went something like this:

**“More than Israel kept the Sabbath, the Sabbath kept Israel.”**

Here’s what I think that means. Imagine living in exile, in a culture utterly opposed to your identity as God’s chosen people. Your temple has been demolished; your sacrificial system is completely gone. All of the things that set you apart as a people are taken from you. But Sabbath was a practice you could still carry out as a community. The practice of Sabbath did way more than simply give the Israelites a break now and again, it united them in exile. It helped them maintain a distinct identity. Remember, God is creating a nation placed in the middle of all these other empires and is showing the world what it means to belong to the Creator. He’s not only protecting Israel from a drift toward self-reliance, he’s revealing to the other nations that he alone is the great provider and protector by commanding his people to simply rest.

Sabbath, both then and now, is a practice to keep us from being completely absorbed into a culture that is out of step with the life we were created for. It reminds us of *who* we are and *from whom* we receive our worth.

But this invitation to rest isn’t only an Old Testament concept. Listen to what Jesus himself says in Matthew 11:

**“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” – Matthew 11:28-30**

Did you hear that? Come to me…and I will give you what? *Rest*. Not burdens. Not to-do lists. Rest. I love the way Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase of this passage reads:

**“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace.” – Matthew 11:28-29 (The Message)**

“The unforced rhythms of grace.” Could anyone use a little more of that in their life? I know I could!

Think about music. In music, activity doesn’t go on indefinitely. Compositions have to include both sound and silence. In fact, in musical notation – when a note isn’t played, what’s it called? That’s right – a rest. That’s central to understanding rhythm. Every note has to have a stopping point or the piece becomes chaos. Can you imagine what it would sound like if an orchestra played every note, every sound all at once! It would be unbearable. It would sound like this… (Clip of band you don’t like) Sorry, just saw that as an opportunity to take a cheap shot at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. But seriously, rest is necessary in music, and it’s necessary in our lives.

Realize, when Jesus spoke these words to his 1st-century Jewish audience, they were revolutionary. His invitation to rest blew people’s minds because in Jesus’ day, religion had become a system of never-ending obligations, rules, and guidelines. There was constant pressure to “measure up.”

In my own life, I tend to fill my time with tasks. I take on more and more because I *like* being busy. But if I’m honest with myself, I know that what is driving my busyness is desire: the desire to be valued. I constantly evaluate what I’m bringing to the table…what I’m contributing. So in an effort to prove my worth, I end up taking on more and more. Maybe you can relate?

*(Matthew 11:28-30 NIV)* And Jesus isn’t only offering rest – he’s offering us a better way to live, a way where we take on his yoke by discarding our own. Now, you may be asking, *“What the heck is a yoke?”* I’m so glad you asked, city slicker. A yoke is a wooden crosspiece that is fastened over the necks of two animals and attached to the plow or cart that they are to pull. It is designed to spread a burden across an animal’s shoulders so that one part is not overly strained.

Think of the yoke as a symbol of all that you have to pull in life. All the responsibilities you have or have taken on. We all have a yoke. Now, I want you to see something here. Note that Jesus is not *removing* the yoke. He is not some pie in the sky God who ignores the realities of our lives. He knows that we carry weight and responsibilities. What Jesus is offering is a *change* of yokes. Jesus is offering his yoke in place of the one we carry. He says his yoke is lighter and easier. His yoke isn’t like the impossible yokes so many of us carry. His yoke is a yoke that fits. He’s doing more than offering a day off, he’s offering a life we were made for. But in order to receive it, we have to rest. We have to stop. We have to Sabbath.

**How to Sabbath**

So, in light of that, here are a few suggestions for how we can trade all our rushing and busyness and chasing after desire for the unforced rhythms of grace Jesus offers. If you want, pull out your phone or jot these down on a piece of paper. Are you ready for the first one? Here it is:

**STOP**

That’s it. I’m telling you to stop. If you’re going to flourish as a human being the way God intended you to flourish, then you’ve got to stop.

The creator of the Sabbath himself tells us: *(add)*

**“Be still and know that I am God.” -Psalm 46:10**

When do we get to know God? When we are still. When we stop. It can be hard to do this, can’t it? Most of us don't like to stop.

* We don’t like to stop work.
* We don’t like to stop in traffic.
* We don’t like to stop talking. Some of you are thinking, *“Tell me about it. I’m beginning to wonder if you ever will.”*

Pastor John Mark Comer says this about Sabbath: *(switch)*

**“The Sabbath is an entire day set aside to stop - stop working, stop wanting, stop worrying—and to simply rest in God’s presence.” -John Mark Comer**

So many of us feel buried by our “to-do” lists. Maybe it’s time to create a “stop doing” list. We can choose to remove things from our lives that are filling up our time and don’t fit with the focal point of our lives. Maybe we need to ask, “What do I need to say no to in order to make room for God? What things, even good things, are keeping me from the *best* thing?”

If we’re going to Sabbath like God invites us to Sabbath, we’ve got to stop.

The next word is:

**REST**

Once we STOP, the Sabbath calls us to REST. *(add Genesis 2:2-3)* God rested after his work. If God chose to rest after six days of work, who are we to think we don’t need to rest after six days of work?

For some of us, the holiest thing we could do today is to take a nap. We can choose to rest. We can stop living as if everything depends on us because we can trust Jesus is in control. I think a lot of us would start to look a lot more like Jesus if we simply learned to sleep. English preacher Charles Spurgeon put it this way: *(switch)*

**“The bow cannot be always bent without fear of breaking. Repose is as needful to the mind as sleep to the body… Rest time is not waste time. It is economy to gather fresh strength. It is wisdom to take occasional furlough. In the long run, we shall do more by sometimes doing less.” - C.H. Spurgeon**

We need rest from:

* Work
* Physical exertion
* Hurriedness
* Technology
* Decision-making – imagine that? A day where you make no decisions. Sounds pretty awesome, huh?

Is this starting to sound good? Or maybe at the very least like a healthier way to live? Maybe it’s because God designed the Sabbath FOR us…for human flourishing!

The next word is:

**CONTEMPLATE**

Remember that the Sabbath is “holy to the Lord.” Our Sabbath would be incomplete if it didn’t draw us closer to God. Throughout Jewish and Christian history the Sabbath included a time of worship that included gathering with God’s people and reflecting on God’s word. That’s why it’s still ideal for your Sabbath to be on a Sunday when you come together with others who are finding their way back to God.

If your Sabbath isn’t on a day when people gather to celebrate, take some time to on your own to reflect on scripture, pray, journal, and contemplate God’s direction for your life. Sabbath isn’t just a ‘day off’ it’s actually a ‘day on’...focused on the God who created you and delights in you.

One author puts it this way: *(add)*

 **“Culture is a quickly flowing river that can easily carry us away. Sabbath allows us to climb up on the banks to get perspective.” – Jason Feffer**

Now, this last word I’m going to leave you with might surprise you:

**DELIGHT**

Delight is not a word you hear a whole lot is it? Did you know that God delights in us? In the Psalms we read that *(add)*

**“The Lord delights in his people.” - Psalm 149:4**

After finishing his work of creation, God proclaimed that it was “very good.” He was delighting in his creation.

What is it that you love? What reenergizes you?

* Is it taking a long, slow walk in a beautiful place?
* Is it a hobby, a passion?
* Is it a person whose presence recharges you?

When you Sabbath, you slow down and take time to delight in the good things you love.

**Conclusion**

*(All 4 words)* Stop. Rest. Contemplate. Delight.

God designed us to flourish in relationship with himself, each other, and all of creation. We need the Sabbath to be fully human. Maybe a question we could all ask ourselves today is this:

**“What does my pace of life say about what I believe to be true about God?”**

Is God only interested in my output? Is my identity wrapped up in how much I can do? Or does this creative, loving Father, invite every single one of us to deep and abiding rest?

I’ll end with this short illustration from American theologian L.S. Chafer:

*One man challenged another to an all-day wood chopping contest. The challenger worked very hard, stopping only for a brief lunch break. The other man had a leisurely lunch and took several breaks during the day. At the end of the day, the challenger was surprised and annoyed to find that the other fellow had chopped substantially more wood than he had. "I don't get it," he said. "Every time I checked, you were taking a rest, yet you chopped more wood than I did." "But you didn't notice," said the winning woodsman, "that I was sharpening my ax when I sat down to rest."*

Jesus invites us to live in his unforced rhythms of grace. It’s an invitation to trust him with our desires. It’s an invitation to a life of human flourishing. Let’s make room for him in our lives. We will find rest for our souls.

**Communion Idea**

Remember Jesus invitation? He tells us:

**“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” -Jesus**

Communion is a beautiful reminder of Jesus’ invitation to come to him. No matter where we are in our journey of faith, Jesus prepares the table for us and he invites to come and participate of his grace. We do not have to have it all together. In fact, because we do not have it all together is that we need to come and recognize: Jesus we need you more than ever. Are you weary and burdened? Come, just as you are and receive these gifts of God for us. The bread is his body, given for us. The juice, his blood shed for our sins.