

## **No Time for Rest?**

*Matthew 11:26-30; October 2, 2016*

### **Introduction:**

I don't know about you, but I've been really challenged over the past few weeks as we've talked about managing and maximizing our time for the good of others and the glory of God. I've gained greater clarity with my roles in life and have been challenged to pursue God-honoring goals for each of these roles and then to align my schedule and calendar with these goals. But if you're like me, my guess is that you've been confronted with the tension that there's only so many hours in a day and it's really hard to accomplish everything we wish we could do in any given day. Added to this, we've got to sleep and rest at some point, right? Do you realize that if you average 8 hours of sleep a night, you'll end up sleeping about a third of your life. Is that a waste? Should we seek to find some kind of shortcuts around the inevitability of sleep?

Do you know what the tagline is for Caribou Coffee, the second largest coffee franchise in America? Life is short. Stay awake for it. Yet, the CDC lists "insufficient sleep" as a public health problem "...linked to motor vehicle crashes, industrial disasters, and medical and other occupational errors." The continue, "Persons experiencing sleep insufficiency are also more likely to suffer from chronic diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, depressions and obesity, as well as from cancer, increased mortality, and reduced quality of life and productivity." Sounds like sleep and rest is something we should think critically about.

Transition: How does God want us to think about sleep and rest within the framework of managing and maximizing our time? Here's what we're going to do. We're going to spend the first half of our time exploring a biblical overview of sleep and rest, you could call this a theology of rest. Then we're going to apply that theology and right understanding of rest and sleep in very practical ways to our lives.

### **I. Understand the Story of God's Rest.**

#### **Act 1. Creation (Genesis 1-2).**

The very first book of the Bible is Genesis and it records the creation of all things by God over the course of six days following the pattern: "And there was evening and there was morning, the first day," "the second day," and so on. Creation comes to a climax on Day Six with the creation of humans in the image of God but these first six days receive their real significance and consummation on Day Seven (Gen. 2:1-3).

*Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation. (Genesis 2:1-3 ESV)*

The seventh day celebrated the perfect completion of creation with God resting, namely, ceasing from his works of creation accomplished in the previous six days so that he could sit down and reign over his creation for the good of his people. This is astounding. God hasn't just created a place for people to dwell but for himself to dwell also: the presence of God in the place of God with the people of God. Interestingly, there are two very important observations about the seventh day.

- First, this day lacks the formula, "And there was evening and there was morning" (Gen. 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). Why? One author suggests that this points to the "infinitive perspective" of God's rest (Derek Kidner). The seventh day is presented as unending and ongoing throughout human history.
- Second, there is no mention of humans anywhere on this day. Why is this significant? Well, it is assumed that humans, by default, enter into God's divine rest. Another author, therefore, concludes that "the goal of creation, and at the same time the beginning of all that follows, is the event of God's Sabbath freedom, Sabbath rest and Sabbath joy, in which man, too, has been summoned to participate" (Karl Barth). Think about this: you were created to enter into and enjoy the rest of God and in his rest everything is perfect. It's complete peace and shalom. Spiritual, physical and social flourishing. This is home. But the story of the human race is one of exile and longing for "homecoming" (Keller). Why? Enter Act 2.

## **Act 2. The Fall (Genesis 3)**

If by default, humans entered into God's rest on the seventh day, by rebellion (Gen. 3:1-5), the blessing of God's rest is lost along with the peace and shalom that it offered. Death and disease have distorted God's physical creation. Our society is now filled with selfishness, self-exaltation and pride. Additionally, exploitation and violence mar and ruin human community. Adam and Eve are exiled out of the garden and now face God's curse (Gen. 3:14-19).

*And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return." (Genesis 3:17-19 ESV)*

The curse on the ground introduces a new phase of human work characterized by painful toil and futility (Gen. 3:17-19; cf. Rom. 8:20-21). Now, at its best, work is bittersweet. Sin has left us all restless but there is a way to return again to God's rest. Curse, painful toil and exile are not the end of the story. There is a way to be brought home, to be restored and healed, to overcome death and disease and to once again enjoy the rest of God. God promises, even in the midst of such rebellion, to reverse the effects of the fall and bring us home to enjoy his eternal rest and shalom. His promises suggests that this will come about through an individual, an offspring of the woman. This great hope is what drives the entire storyline of Scripture, eventually culminating in Jesus Christ. But that would be to get ahead of ourselves.

### **Act 3. Israel (The rest of the Old Testament)**

Act 3 covers the rest of the Old Testament is it's about God choosing a people through which he would raise up an individual to bring about the great reversal. I can't cover the entire OT today, but one example will have to suffice. In Genesis 5, Noah is presented as a foreshadow of one to come later who would reverse the effects of the Fall and restore rest.

*When Lamech had lived 182 years, he fathered a son and called his name Noah, saying, "Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed, this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands." (Genesis 5:28-29 ESV)*

God's promise suggests the curse on the ground is not God's final word for his creation. Noah, along with his future sacrifice, is a picture and future type that the way back to the enjoyment of God's rest is through the sacrificial offering for sin. As you read through the rest of the OT, you'll find that when Israel occupies the Promised Land they experience rest from their enemies but because of their sin they are eventually exiled...waiting for the salvation that God would bring. The OT is pointing forward to the future and final rest of God.

### **Act 4. Jesus (The Gospels)**

Now go with me to Matthew 11:28-30 (page 816).

*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30 ESV)*

Jesus can invite us to him in order to find rest because he is the bringer of the expected eternal rest of God. In other words, the total salvation which God promised from the very beginning has come to realization through the person and work of Jesus. Jesus left his own home (Phil. 2:6-7) and was crucified outside the city gate, a sign of his exile and rejection (Heb. 13:11-12). He experienced the exile that we deserved. He was cast out so that we could be brought home. His resurrection reversed the effects of the fall by breaking the power of death and disease. Everyone is now invited to come and partake of the rest that he offers to all who trust in him.

### **Act 5. The Church (The Letters in the NT)**

This is where we live and we're going to explore this in the latter half of our time together today.

### **Act 6. New Creation (Revelation 21-22)**

The ultimate goal of rest that was inaugurated in creation has now reached its appointed consummation. God has finally brought to completion his plan of redemption to make all things right. All injustices have now been reversed and there is no more exhaustion, pain, weariness or

death (Rev 21:4). There will be complete ecological transformation, with nothing cursed anymore (Rev 22:3), and social transformation (Rev 21:24; 22:2).<sup>221</sup> Finally, those who endure with faith in Jesus will be returned, not to the garden, but to a new creation in the presence of God, enjoying complete and eternal rest (Rev 14:12–13). As John remarks:

*And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. (Revelation 21:3 ESV)*

Thus, the story has come to an end in one sense, but it really goes on and on forever and ever. The world is now how it was always supposed to be.

## **II. Find your Place in the Story of God's Rest (Act 5: The Church)**

### **1. Enter into his Rest**

Heart piercing questions:

- Are you searching for rest and fulfillment?
- Have you been trying to earn God's favor and failing to measure up?
- Have you been searching for pleasure and satisfaction through all that this world can offer and worn out trying?
- Do the ongoing effects of sin weigh heavy on your soul (sickness, cancer, death, brokenness, injustice, you name it)?
- Are you at the end of your rope?

We all long for and are searching for rest and fulfillment. We pursue excessive pleasures, relationships, false religions, philosophy...you name it. These all leave us weary, restless and tired. But what Augustine said many years ago is still true for you and I today: "You [God] have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless, until they can find rest in you" (Augustine, *Confessions*).

### **The Point: The restless find rest in Jesus.**

The first way you should respond to the story of God's rest is to enter into Jesus' rest through faith in him. Jesus doesn't offer you a list of 5 tips to relieve your weariness or some other kind of pragmatic self-help, he offers himself.

Illustration: Zoe and Sleep

- I can't sleep without "smiley." What if we could get to the point where we really believed, "I can't rest without Jesus."

*Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. (1 Peter 5:6-7 ESV)*

When you believe, you exchange your burdensome yolk with the light burden of simply trusting in Jesus. He does all the work and give you all of the rest. When you believe, the eternal life of the age to come becomes a present reality, experienced through the gift of the Holy Spirit, a foretaste of the life to come (Acts 2; John 14–16; Eph 1:13–14). This is a rest available to you every hour and day of the week, not just on Saturdays or Sundays. If your soul is restless, physical sleep and rest will never be enough. So, from this point of view, your entire Christian life should be a resting in God through Christ with his presence and peace quieting all of your fears, worries and burdens.

But in another sense, though the rest we experience in Christ is a real rest, it is still only a foretaste. It is incomplete waiting for the consummation of eternal rest when Jesus returns.

*And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (Romans 8:23 ESV)*

Thus, there is the need for us to not just enter once into Jesus' rest, but to persevere in faith (Heb. 4:9-11).

## **2. Proclaim his Rest**

The message of rest is a message that the world is hungry to hear. Many are restless and weary longing for a way to return home to God's rest. When you share the good news of Jesus, it's an offer to come to Jesus to find rest for your souls. Who do you know right around you that needs to hear this message? Will you pray for an opportunity to share this with them?

## **3. Display his Rest**

Since rest isn't simply about sleeping but about an enjoyment of the perfect peace and rest of God, namely, a reversal of the effects of the Fall, we should display this rest by engaging in a social concern for justice. As you come to Jesus and find rest in him, what are you going to do that brings justice and mercy and offers healing and hope? This is true neighborly love. When you engage in social justice, you are pointing others to what the coming kingdom with the return of Jesus will be like.

## **4. Rightly Order Your Life to get Rest**

Since we still wait for the consummation of eternal rest when Jesus returns, we're still going to wrestle with the effects of sin in this world. Our physical bodies will still experience exhaustion, pain, suffering and even death. Additionally, because of the Fall, we will be inclined either toward excessive rest displayed in slothfulness, laziness and idleness or incessant and excessive work, resulting in a lack of rest, exhaustion and even sickness. So, yes, "the time has fully come," but "the days are evil" (Eph. 5:15-16; Col. 4:5). Time has been redeemed and yet we are commanded to redeem it. Therefore, in addition to entering into, proclaiming and displaying God's rest, we should right order our lives with healthy rhythms of work, sleep and rest. If God

wanted to, he could've created us with no need for sleep. But he didn't for two main reasons.

- Physical rest is a reminder that you aren't God.
  - John Piper says that "Sleep is like a broken record that comes around with the same message every day: Man is not sovereign. Man is not sovereign."
- Physical rest displays trust and dependence on God's gracious provision.
  - Piper continues, "[God] is not nearly so impressed with our late nights and early mornings as he is with the peaceful trust that casts all anxieties on him and sleeps.
  - Could your lack of sleep be due to a lack of trust in God. You worry about all you didn't accomplish today or everything you need to do tomorrow. You worry about that every increasing task list. You'd rather worry than cast your cares on him.

#### **The negative side effects of lack of sleep:**

- Michael Hyatt gives this illustration: "Cheating our sleep is like maxing our credit cards. There's a benefit now—at least, it feels like it—but the bill always comes due in the form of decreased health and mental ability. No one would choose to be sick and stupid, but depriving our bodies of sleep is the same thing. Robbing our sleep is robbing our productivity" (Michael Hyatt).
- It will increase your chance of catching a cold
- It increases the chances of diabetes and obesity.
- It results in moodiness and irritability
- It invites unnecessary stress into your life which contributes to depression, fatigue, weight gain and high blood pressure.

#### **The positive side effects of healthy sleep:**

- It keeps us sharp
- It improves our ability to remember, learn and grow.
- It refreshes our emotional state.
- It revitalizes our bodies.
- It increases our productivity
  - We live in a society that puts a high value on achievement and not much on rest. There's an ongoing pressure to do more with less.
  - People brag, not about how much sleep their getting, but about how much they are missing.
  - What if the best thing you could do to increase productivity and maximize your time was to get the right amount of sleep?
  - One church leader that I really respect says this: "Today, I don't cheat sleep anymore. In fact, I believe getting a full night's sleep and even taking naps is a secret weapon most leaders miss. You think more clearly and are simply nicer to be around when you're rested. Everyone is. And those are two key characteristics of effective leaders. Everyone will ask you to stay up later to get things done. Don't. Go to bed on time. You'll actually get more done—refreshed and alive in the morning" (Carey Nieuwhof).

### **Prioritize sleep and rest**

- For some of you, the most spiritual thing you can do this week is assess your sleeping habits and goals and adjust to get healthy rest.
- The National Institute of Health suggests that school-age children need at least 10 hours of daily sleep, teens need 9-10 hours and adults need 7-8 hours.
- In order to prioritize daily sleep, you're going to have to manage your time well:
  - Eliminate time wasters
  - Put your phone away (digital detox)
  - Cut the TV off
  - Get to bed on time
- Sleep tips:
  - Go to bed at the same time each night and rise at the same time each morning.
  - Avoid large meals before bedtime.
  - Avoid caffeine close to bedtime.
- Caveat:
  - Sleep won't look the same for everyone (new moms, certain jobs, etc.).
  - God might call us to sacrifice sleep at times just like he calls us to sacrifice eating at times (fasting).
- Look for ways to build in healthy rhythms of weekly times of rest and annual times of rest (spend your vacation time).

**The Point: The restless find rest in Jesus.**